TINKHAM BROS'
TIDE MILL

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THE

TINKHAM BROTHERS'

TIDE-MILL

BY

J. T. TROWBRIDGE

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THE TINKHAM BROTHERS' TIDE-MILL.

CHAPTER I.

ON THE TAMMOSET RIVER.

A YOUNG fellow, about seventeen years old, — a mere boy, in fact, with a rather solid-looking but fresh and pleasant face, — stepped from a train at the Tammoset station, one March afternoon, and looked about him with the air of a stranger.

After a brief survey of the plashy village streets, bordered with gutters half full of snow and sluggish water, he addressed a flag-man who was coming along the platform.

"Can you show me Dempford Street?"

"First street to the left," was the ready answer, illustrated by a motion of the flag rolled up on its stick.

"Does that take me to the river?"

"Straight to the river, — straight to Dempford Bridge."

"And Mr. Dushee's place?"

"Oh, Dushee's!" said the flag-man. "That's a little off the main track. Turn to your right, just before you get to the bridge, and keep down the river a few rods, till you see an old mill."

"That's just what I want to see," the boy replied, with a look of satisfaction. "Much obliged."

Picking his way along the muddy sidewalks, he passed beyond the village, and in a few minutes came to the brow of a hill, where he paused.

Below was the river, sweeping, full-banked and strong, across the foreground of a brown landscape, mottled with dingy patches of snow-drifts. On the left, not very far away, was a large pond or lake, still ice-bound, except near the mouth, out of which the dark current flowed. There were orchards and groves, and pleasant residences here and there, on the far-winding shores.

"That must be fine in summer," he said to himself, with a smile. "We'll keep a boat and go a-fishing, and have some jolly sails, — if the chickens I'm counting will only hatch. Won't it be nice to take mother out, and row with her along by those woods, just after sunset? — if she will only agree to my plans. And Letty, won't she like it! But I know it can't be; it's all too good to come true."

And yet there was a look on his face which said that it *should* come true, if the determined will and good wit of a boy of his size could accomplish it.

The river flowed beneath the bridge at the foot of the slope, and making a curve to the right, soon disappeared under the hill, which terminated there in a low bluff. On the summit of that was an old-fashioned house, and just beyond, through the bare boughs of a large willow-tree, appeared a brown roof.

"That must be the mill," he exclaimed, starting to walk toward it.

Descending the bluff, he took a foot-path along the river's brink, amidst a scene picturesque enough even at that season of the year.

On his right was the bluff, or high bank, to the steep side of which heavy snow-drifts still clung. On his left, the whirling stream rushed on toward a low dam, over which it broke with a sound that was music to his ears. The mossy turf of the path he trod was supported by the roots of willow-trees that overleaned the water, in the largest of which — an immense pollard, with stout branches — seats were framed, with a little foot-bridge of plank leading to them from the top of the bank.

"What a place for mother to sit and sew, in pleas-

ant weather!" he said to himself, with ever-kindling enthusiasm. "We 'll put a little railing along by the plank, and we can help her over safely. It beats all the bay-windows in the world! Right over the water, and up among the birds!"

A pair of those early comers, the bluebirds, were there already, flitting in the boughs, their beautiful plumage and richly warbled notes hinting of the delights of the season of leaves and flowers now so near at hand.

But, while taking in with keen interest so many things, the eye of the boy did not neglect the principal object of his visit.

That rose before him, at the end of the path, close by the great willow, — a little, old, brown, two-story building, built partly over the water, at the end of the dam, and partly against the high bank.

A door at the end of the path opened into a shed-like wing, where his eye was delighted with the sight of a forge with its great bellows.

"This is what the boys will like!" he said, with a nod and a smile. "And there is the water-wheel! I wonder why it is n't going. I believe the place is deserted."

He peeped through an open doorway, leading from the shed into the lower story of the mill, and

saw on one side a long work-bench with lathes, a circular saw beyond, wheels and boards overhead, and all sorts of odd litter scattered about the room.

Nothing very attractive, you would have said; and yet the sight filled the boyish visitor with mild rapture.

"Everything is lovely, so far! But I must n't appear too well pleased. There 's somebody."

The roof of the shed formed a walk from the upper story of the mill to the top of the bank. Footsteps were heard on the boards overhead, and presently a chubby-faced boy appeared beyond, descending a path through the slushy snow.

"I 've come to look at your mill," said Boy Number One, carelessly.

"Wall, ye can look; don't cost nothin'," said Boy Number Two, with a grin.

"It 's a dilapidated old shell," remarked Number One.

"Wall, kind o'," said Number Two, "though she ain't so old as she looks. She never had no coat of paint; that 's what 's the matter."

"I should think so," said Number One. "Is the water power good for anything?"

"Good for anything?" echoed Number Two, as he went and stood by Number One and watched the

current rushing by the undershot wheel. "There 's power enough."

"Why is n't somebody using it, then?"

"Well, we might; tide is going out strong now."

"You are dependent on the tide, are you?"

"Of course," said Number Two. "Don't you know? It 's a tide-mill."

"I 'm not much acquainted with tide-mills," Number One replied. "Explain it to me."

"This is the Tammoset River," said Number Two, "though some folks call it the Dempford River. It runs between two towns. This is Tammoset on this side, and that is Dempford over there."

"And what 's the name of the lake?"

"That 's got more names than a poor man has shirts," grinned Boy Number Two. "Some folks call it Tammoset Lake, and some Dempford Lake; but most generally they say jest the lake, or the pond."

"Do you mean to say that the tide flows all the way up here from the harbor?"

"Course I do! Why not? It 's only about seven miles, and there 's scarce any fall to the water."

"Is the water of the lake salt or fresh?" asked the strange boy.

"Fresh, of course," the Tammoset boy replied.

"No salt water ever gits up as fur as here, without 't is in a very dry time. They do say the water in the bottom of the pond is a leetle mite brackish; though I don't know how anybody knows."

"I see," remarked the visitor, who was not quite so ignorant as he had been willing to appear. "When the tide comes in, it forces back the flow of fresh water; but it turns again before it gets up as far as here. Salt water being heavier than fresh, any that gets into the lake would stay at the bottom."

While they were talking, there came a sudden rush of water under the wheel, which began to move, slowly at first, then with a brisk rush of the revolving paddles.

"There she goes!" said the Tammoset boy. "I told you 't was about time for her to begin to hum. Do you want to see father?"

"Is Mr. Dushee your father?"

"Yes, and he owns the mill; and he wants to sell it. Do you know of anybody who wants to buy?"

The Tammoset boy spoke so eagerly that the boy who really wanted to buy thought it best to appear more indifferent than ever.

"I 'd like to see him by and by. Why does he want to sell?"

"Oh, I d'n' know! Tired on 't, I s'pose. Wants to git into some other kind o' business, where he won't have to work so hard."

"That 's natural," said the visitor. "Show me how you take advantage of the tide."

The boy who belonged to the place led the way to a platform over the end of the dam, and pointed out a broad opening in it, stopped by movable boards, over which the water poured.

"Them 's the *flash-boards*," he explained, "When the tide runs up they float, and let it go up into the pond. Those ropes keep 'em from floating away. After the tide turns, and we want the power, all we 've got to do is to put down the flash-boards. Soon 's the water has fell away a leetle from the lower side, we 've got about as smart a water-power, till tide comes up again, as ever ye need to have, for a small, perty business, ye know. Two tides a day, understand."

"Only, one of them 's apt to be in the night," replied the visitor, with a laugh. "Do you own any land on the other side?"

"No need of that," said the mill-boy. "Father jest bought the right of the owner to build his dam and keep it there ninety-nine years. I don't know why they did n't say a hundred while they was about it."

"Ninety-nine seems long enough for all practical purposes," said the visitor, hardly able to conceal his delight at the general aspect of things. "What's the price of the old trap, any way?"

"I don't know what the price is; but father says he means to sell for what he can git," said young Dushee, innocently.

"Oh, does he?" thought the visitor, with secret glee; not that he was at all anxious to obtain the property for less than it was worth, but that, having already set his heart on it, he earnestly hoped that the price would come within the means at his command.

CHAPTER II.

THE OWNER OF THE MILL.

A LARGE-FACED, sandy-complexioned man was at work before a lathe when the two boys entered the shop. He was turning what promised to be a croquet-ball, making the fine chips fly, and the round, ragged-looking block hum.

As the mill-boy had just such another flabby-cheeked, sandy countenance, laid out on a smaller scale, the visitor did not need to be told that he was in the presence of the elder Dushee.

He watched the operation of turning with lively interest, while the son spoke to his father, and tried to attract his attention. But the elder Dushee, having noticed by a glance that it was only another boy who had come in with his boy, kept steadily at his work, with no more expression in the extensive features than if they had been composed of the sand they so much resembled.

After a while he paused in his cutting to apply the curved arms of a measure to his revolving ball. Then the son tried again.

"Here 's somebody to look at the mill. Guess he wants to buy!"

Instantly a gleam of sunshine lighted up the Saraha-like countenance, — a smile, in other words, — which was turned hospitably on the youthful stranger.

"Come to look at the mill, have ye?" Scanning him closely, and seeing what a mere boy he was, the man added, "But I don't s'pose *you* want to buy?"

"No, I don't," said the visitor.

The sunshine faded from the desert.

"But I know parties who may wish to purchase," he continued, "and I have come to examine and report."

"Oh! all right." The sandy waste lighted up again. "I'll show you what we 've got here."

"Don't leave your work," said the visitor.

"That can wait. I happened to get hold of some good apple-tree wood, and I thought I would turn a few croquet sets," Mr. Dushee explained. "Who are the parties you speak of?"

"Well, my brothers and myself. There are five of us altogether. I am the third. Our name is Tinkham."

"The Tinkham boys! I have heard of the Tink-

ham boys!" Mr. Dushee exclaimed. "And, by George, I owe 'em a grudge, too!"

"I am sorry for that," replied young Tinkham modestly.

"Yes, sir," said Mr. Dushee, good-naturedly, notwithstanding his grudge. "I was making a very nice doll's carriage for Mellen & Co.; they sold all I could turn out. But all to once they said, 'Mr. Dushee, we can't take any more of them carriages at that price.' 'What's up?' says I. Says they, 'We have to retail your carriage at three dollars; but here's some, jest about as good, — better, too, in some respects, — that we can sell for two.' 'Whose carriages be them?' says I, and I'll own that they was mighty cute little things. By two or three ingenious tricks the inventors had managed to make a cheaper article than mine, while it was quite as perty, — maybe pertier, — and nigh about as strong."

The visitor smiled quietly, while Mr. Dushee went on.

"'Whose make be them?' says I. 'The Tinkham boys',' says they. 'Who's the Tinkham boys?' says I. 'The Widder Tinkham's,' says they. 'That's about all we know of 'em; only that they've got [illegible]ng heads on their shoulders, and can make dolls'

carriages cheaper 'n you can.' 'Very well,' says I, 'let 'em make 'em.' But I tell ye I was mad!"

"That little carriage was my brother Luther's notion," said the Tinkham boy present. "He 's only nineteen, but he 's full of ideas, and can do almost anything he sets out to. He did n't set out to undersell you, Mr. Dushee, or to injure your business; but he saw there might be improvements made in dolls' carriages, and it appears that he succeeded in making them."

"Oh, that 's all right!" Mr. Dushee said. "Where 's your shop?"

"We have n't any shop of our own," the Tinkham boy answered, frankly, "and we are looking about for one. That is, I saw your advertisement, and thought perhaps your tide-mill would suit our purpose."

"Should n't wonder if it would!" said the proprietor, gleefully; "should n't wonder a mite! Where have you done your work?"

"At home, and in our Uncle Dave Darrill's sawmill. My older brothers, Luther and Martin, began to make things for their own amusement while they were going to school. Then, when father died, and they had to go to work, they thought they would put some of their toys and knick-knacks on the market.

A few sold pretty well, and that encouraged them to invent more. They have made a good many of their own tools, and contrived the machinery they have put up in uncle's mill. I am not much of an inventor, myself," the Tinkham boy went on, "but I am a tolerably good workman, and I believe I've a head for business."

"I should think you had!" said Mr. Dushee, with increasing good-humor.

"I don't want to be separated from my brothers; I want to keep the family together," the representative of the Tinkhams went on, with a swell of emotion in his tones. "I have two younger brothers, still at school, and one sister. My mother fell and broke her knee on a bad place in the sidewalk, just after father died, and she is a cripple. We want to keep her with us."

"A good idee! a good idee!" Mr. Dushee exclaimed, the sunshine of his smile expanding until it seemed to spread all over the continent of his person, and put him into a universal glow.

"The time has come when the boys ought to have a shop of their own, with a little elbow-room and water-power. I want to keep with them, and learn to be the business man of the concern. Then

our younger brothers can work into it. That 's my plan, and that 's why I have come — "

Suddenly, seeming to recollect himself, the visitor hesitated. He had set out to be very diplomatic, and here he was telling the honest truth and exposing his secret motives without any caution whatever. Indeed, it was not in Rush Tinkham's frank and impulsive nature to use much reserve and *finesse*, however needful he might think them in advancing his personal interests; but he instinctively broke through them, and stood on the solid and enduring ground of sincerity.

"You 've come to jest the right place," Mr. Dushee made haste to assure him. "This is jest the mill you want!" showing his visitor about the little factory. "Everything in perfect repair, shabby as things look. Good water-power, good machinery, plenty of room. Come up-stairs."

Rush Tinkham felt sure that his brothers would be delighted with what he saw. But he said discreetly, —

"I should n't wonder if it would suit us. Now, about the price. Put your figures right down to the lowest point; then, if we can reach up to them, I 'll try to have my brothers come out and see the property."

"You ought to buy the whole place," said the owner; "good house, an acre of land, garden, and stable."

"I should like that, if we can afford it," said Rush; thinking, "We'll keep a horse, and give mother such nice rides!"

Mr. Dushee then showed him the house and grounds, the boy's keen eyes taking in everything, while he often said to himself, "Mother will like this; won't mother take comfort in that?" for, though simple and plain, everything was spacious and comfortable compared with the narrow quarters which the family occupied in the city.

"Nice place, ain't it?" said the proprietor, with his most expansive smile, as they returned to the mill.

"I like it," Rush replied, frankly; "and I am surprised that you should want to part with it."

"I don't want to," said Mr. Dushee. "But if I sell the mill I don't care to keep the house. And I want to sell the mill because the Tinkham boys cut under me, and make dolls' carriages cheaper 'n I can."

He laughed. Rush laughed too, and said, —

"There 's no other reason?"

"That 's the principal reason. My ways are ruther

old-fashioned, and I can't get out of the ruts; I can't compete with younger men with their modern improvements."

"Your water-power is all right?" Rush inquired.

The owner grinned. Young Dushee also grinned, with a curious expression, as he stood and listened to the conversation and watched his father's face.

"It ought to be; I 've used it nigh on to fifteen year. I 've never seen the time," the elder Dushee added, "when I could n't depend on eight hours, in every twelve, of good running power. Each tide is about two hours coming up. In about two hours more it will be running down fast enough for the wheel. Then we have eight hours, as I say, before the water sets back again. In the driest time, when fresh water fails and a good many mills have to stop, the tide keeps up the supply here."

"You 've a right to dam the stream?" said Rush, looking out on the river from a window.

"A perfect right," the elder Dushee declared, rather earnestly, while the younger watched his face with the same curious grin which Rush would have done well to observe. "It don't injure nobody. It keeps the level of the lake stiddier 'n it would be without it, and that 's ruther an advantage to landowners than otherwise."

"I should think it might be in the way of boats," Rush suggested.

There was a sort of sunset flush on the sandy desert of a face, as the proprietor answered, stoutly, —

"Whether 't is or not, it has been there, as I said, nigh on to fifteen year; and it has a perfect right to be there, for this ain't a navigable stream."

They then talked of terms, and Mr. Dushee, after much hesitation, named a price for the whole place, and also a separate price for the mill.

"If everything is as you say, and as it looks to be," said Rush, "I 'll have my brothers, and perhaps my uncle, come and talk with you."

"It 's jest as I say, and jest as it looks," Mr. Dushee assured him. Then, as Rush started to go, he said, "Wait till we tackle up, and my boy shall carry you over to the depot. Dick, run and be backing out the buggy."

Rush Tinkham took a last survey of the mill, the river, and the pleasant grounds, while father and son were "tackling up," and the father gave the son this parting counsel, —

"Watch the clock on the steeple, and keep driving till jest a minute or two afore train-time, so he won't have no chance to talk with anybody else about the mill. And be sure you don't let on anything about—"

Here he lowered his voice, for the horse was harnessed, and Rush was coming to get into the buggy.

Returning along the hillside toward the lake, Rush, from the high buggy seat, observed an object which had hardly attracted his attention when he passed within sight of it on foot. It was an odd-looking, half-finished structure, partly hidden by trees on the shore.

"What are they building over there?" he asked of Dick Dushee.

Now, as this was a dangerously near approach to the subject which he had been warned by his father not to "let on anything about," Dick Dushee, I regret to say, prevaricated.

"Oh, I d'n' know," he replied. "Some sort of a summer house, I believe."

"An odd-looking summer house," was Rush Tinkham's comment, "and an ugly object to be set there, on the lake shore."

Dick Dushee looked straight before his nose at the horse's tail, and made no reply.

They rode on, and, with his mind full of other things, Rush thought no more of the odd-looking "summer house," destined though it was to be the source of unnumbered woes to the future owners of the tide-mill.

CHAPTER III.

THE TINKHAM FAMILY.

RUSH TINKHAM went home that evening full of enthusiasm for the purchase of the Dushee property.

"It seems as though the place had been made on purpose for us," he said, drawing his chair up to the table where the family were already at supper. "We must have it! We will have it!"

"Even if we have to steal it," suggested Martin, the oldest son, whose habit it was to grow cool as the juniors grew warm on any subject.

He had a dry way with him, and a serious drawl, which, together with a trick of drawing down one side of his homely mouth, gave a droll effect to his little sarcasms.

"You would say steal it, or anything, to have it, if you should pay it a visit," said Rush. "Oh! the nice water-power, the iron lathe and the wood lathe, the steam-box, the forge, the jig-saws, and things, — it would do your heart good, Mart, to see 'em!"

"I rather think it would make my heart ache to see what I could n't have," Mart replied.

"Rush has got tide-mill on the brain," remarked Luther, the second son, a near-sighted youth in glasses, which gave a singularly old look to his face of nineteen. He stammered a little. "F-f-funny! Rush can't invent anything, and yet he 's the one who is so anxious for us to have a f-f-f-factory of our own."

"You are just as anxious as he is," spoke up Letty, the sister, a bright girl in her sixteenth year; "but you are not half so enterprising."

"Come, children," said the mild mother, in her cripple's chair, which had been drawn up to the table, "postpone your disputes, and hear what Rocket has to say."

"Rocket" was the playful family name for Rush; though I am not sure that any one could have told how he ever came by it. Perhaps it was on account of an eager, impetuous way he had of starting up and darting off on new enterprises, — a trait which had been more noticeable in him two or three years before than now.

Or it may have been suggested by his real name. Since a rocket goes with a rush, why should not "Rush" give rise to "Rocket"?

Each of the children had some such nickname, and it was a beautiful trait of the mother that, despite her years, her widowhood, and her crippled limb, she entered into all innocent sportiveness of this sort with as much spirit as any of them.

"The tide-mill is my idea, and, for that reason, Mart and Lute oppose it," said Rush. "But they'll come round. It's just the place for you, mother; and for you, Letty! Such a great willow-tree as there is, with seats in it, almost over the water, and a foot-plank running to them from the bank! A pair of bluebirds came while I was there, and told me how pleasant it was in summer."

"Oh!" exclaimed Letty, sharing his enthusiam. "You make me want to fly to get there! I'm longing for trees and water!"

"And, of course, we shall keep a boat and a horse; and, mother, you shall have the loveliest rides on the lake and the fine Tammoset roads!" Rush rattled on. "And a garden for flowers and vegetables, — think of that! And pigs and chickens, boys!" addressing the two youngest, at the end of the table.

"I go in for the pigs and chickens!" cried Rupert, aged fourteen.

"Let's move to-morrow!" exclaimed Rodman, aged twelve.

"But you have n't told us the price of all these fine things," said the mother, with a smile.

"Yes, Rocket," added Martin, who was far more interested than he appeared. "Now for the cold water."

"The asking price is four thousand dollars. But I 've no doubt we can buy it for three, for Dushee is awfully anxious to sell. That includes everything; and there is an acre of land. By the way, boys, there 's a good joke!"

And, to explain Dushee's motive for selling, Rush told the story of the dolls' carriages which Luther's had driven out of the market.

That pleased Luther, and brought him over to Rush's side.

"Now, I 've something to tell you," he said. "Mart to-day received a p-p-proposal to make all the wood-work of Cole & Co.'s fire-works. To do that we shall need our own shop."

"Oh, now! if everything is n't made on purpose!" said Rush. "Dushee said he must have half down in cash, say fifteen hundred. You 've got twelve hundred, mother; and I 'm sure we can raise the rest somehow, with enough to move and start with."

The widow smiled, but with something like a look of pain.

"My poor little twelve hundred dollars!" she said; "all I have in the world!"

"Except your children, mother," said Letty, with a high, proud look. "See those five stalwart boys!"

"And my dear, darling daughter!" said the mother, with starting tears. "I know better than anybody else what you all are to me. I am rich in your love and help. But I must look out carefully for my twelve hundred dollars, just the same. I can't — I can't risk that!"

"Where's the risk?" Rush asked. "I tell you this is a big thing, that has been kept waiting for us. We're bound to succeed, and build up a business, and make such a home for you, mother, as you never could have unless we launched out a little."

"Well, well! we'll see," said Mrs. Tinkham, quickly brushing away a tear, and smiling resolutely. "We shall do nothing rashly."

"Of course," replied Rush. "I want Lute and Mart and Uncle Dave to go and see the place, examine it thoroughly, and make sure that everything about it is all right; and then buy it only if they think it's best."

There was much more talk on the exciting topic, the result of which was that the two oldest boys and

their uncle visited the Dushee place two days later, and got the refusal of it for thirty-six hundred dollars, — sixteen hundred to be paid in cash, the remainder to be secured by mortgage.

The uncle advised the purchase, and Mart and Lute were now as eager as Rush himself to get possession of the old tide-mill and the river-side home. They had not noticed the odd-looking "summer house" on the lake shore.

The boys had two hundred dollars of their own, and their uncle, who knew them well and believed in them, offered to lend them five hundred more. After that the mother could no longer withhold her consent.

To make every step secure, a lawyer examined the title to the property, and, that being found satisfactory, the bargain was finally closed, to the great joy of Rush and his brothers, and equally to the satisfaction of Mr. Dushee.

"They're young and plucky; they can fight it better'n I can," he remarked, with a big sigh of relief, when he told Dick that he had at last got the "plaguy thing" off his hands. "Now let 'em find out!"

CHAPTER IV.

THE NEW HOME.

THE Dushees moved into a smaller house on the Dempford side of the river, and on the first of April the Tinkhams took possession of their new home.

Rush drove his mother and Letty over from the Tammoset station in Mr. Dushee's buggy, which the boys had about decided to purchase, together with the horse, harnesses, and a good business wagon, — these being among the many things the owner would now have no use for, and which, he said, ought to go with the mill.

"A pretty fair sort of a horse," Rush remarked, as he drove out of the village. "Get up!" — with a flourish of the whip. "Not a two-forty nag, exactly, — go 'long, will you! — not very stunning in the way of beauty, but he'll do till we can afford a better."

"He looks well enough, I'm sure," replied his mother. "And why should boys always wish to travel so fast? I never expected we should be able

to keep a horse at all; and such a one as this, even, seems too much — too great a blessing!"

"Oh, he's beautiful, if he is only ours," said Letty. "To think of keeping our own horse and carriage! It's like a dream."

"I hope it won't all turn out to be a big April fool," said the mother, with a smile in which quivered a deep and tender emotion. "That's what I am afraid of."

The weather was fine; nearly all the first birds had come; there was a sweet scent of spring in the air. Letty, full of girlish hopes and gay spirits, was delighted with everything; and it was easy to see that, under all her doubts and misgivings as to this important change in their lives, the widow felt a tranquil joy.

Until that day Rush had not seen the place since his first visit, and the others had not seen it at all. It now appeared to him even more attractive than before, and he experienced the anxious pleasure of watching their first impressions as they saw the lake, the river, the mill roof appearing among the willows above the bank, and the old-fashioned house which was to be their future home.

Letty was almost wild with enthusiasm, while in the mother's eyes glistened that happiness which is akin to tears.

"Did n't I tell you it was nice?" Rush said, exultingly.

"Oh, yes!" said Letty; "but I could n't believe it was half so nice as it is."

"It is very charming, indeed," said the mother. "What a pretty little plateau the house stands on! I did n't think I should live to enjoy a home surrounded only by the air and sunshine, with no near neighbors but the trees and birds."

"There 's Lute coming out to meet us," said Letty.

The boys had arrived with the loads of goods earlier in the day, and had been busy putting things to rights and preparing for their mother, whom they wished to spare the trials of moving.

Lute ran out, hatless, in his shirt-sleeves, his honest face beaming behind the spectacles, which gave it an almost comically wise look, and stammered his joyful greeting.

"Well, m-m-mother, this is j-j-jolly! We did n't want you to come a minute before; but now we 're about r-r-ready for you."

He reached to lift her from the wagon, as tenderly as if she had been a child, at the same time ordering Rush to "t-t-tumble out." But Rush said, —

"I want to drive her around the place first, and show her the mill and the river."

"A fine red rooster crowed a shrill welcome."—Page 37.

"All right," said Lute. "That will give us a l-l-little more time."

He ran in to give some finishing touches to his mother's room, which was the first part of the house the boys had meant to have comfortable, in order to make her arrival as pleasant a surprise as possible.

Rush drove around by the little barn, along the track toward the mill; while Letty, who had leaped from the buggy, ran on before, light and happy as one of the newly arrived birds.

Hens were squawking with lazy content in the warm sun beside the barn. A pullet was cackling excitedly within, — over a new-laid egg, Rush said, — and a fine red rooster, stepping aside from the track as they passed, crowed a shrill welcome, — sounds full of pleasant rural suggestion to ears and hearts long shut up in city walls.

Then came shouts of boyish laughter, as the two youngest, Rupert and Rodman, ran out of the upper story of the mill, along the level shed-roof, to meet the buggy bringing their mother.

Rush turned out on the turf near the edge of the bank, and stopped where they could look down on the mill and the river, while Letty skipped along the foot-plank to the seats in the branches of the great willow.

"Oh, mother, you must come here!" she cried. "You never saw so lovely a spot!"

"Yes, yes, I see; it is all too lovely!" Mrs. Tinkham exclaimed, with a tremulous smile.

"Here 's Mart," said Rush. "He and I can take you up and carry you right over there without the least trouble."

"So you shall, some time," his mother replied. "I foresee that I am to spend many happy hours in that grand old tree over the stream. But not now; I must go into the house, and see how things are getting on."

"Yes, mother," said Mart, coming to the side of the buggy, and looking up at her with an expression which beautified his rather lank face and homely mouth. "I want you to come and look at your little nest. Drive around, Rocket!"

At the side door he took her in his arms, and, in spite of her protestations, — for, with the help of her crutches, or an arm to lean on, she could walk, — carried her through the kitchen and sitting-room (where things were still in a chaotic state), into a room beyond, where he set her down gently in her own easy-chair.

She looked wonderingly about her. It was her own carpet on the floor, her own bed set up and

freshly made, with the pictures on the walls and the vases on the mantel to which her eyes had long been accustomed.

"There!" said Mart. "We want you to stay here, and try to make yourself contented, while we straighten out things in the other parts of the house. We are getting along finely with the woman we have hired, and we don't mean that you shall take a step."

"Oh, this is too much!" said Mrs. Tinkham, seeing how hard the boys had tried to make her new home home-like to her at the start. "I think there never were such children as mine."

She had to cry a little, but soon dried her eyes in her quick, resolute way, and observed, —

"The poor old carpet was n't quite large enough, was it?"

"All the better," said Lute, who peered in through his spectacles to enjoy her surprise. "For if it was, the r-r-room would be smaller."

"I am so glad you are to have a good large room now, mother!" Letty exclaimed. "We used to crowd you so in the other house!"

It was a happy thought to the widow that her daughter and five sons had always found her room so attractive; and she now looked around with pleasant anticipations of the comfort they would

all take together there on future evenings and Sunday afternoons.

"I never had the sun in my windows so before," she said. "I am afraid, boys, you've given me the best room in the house."

"We mean to make it the best, as soon as we can afford it," said Mart. "We knew you would n't like this wall-paper very well; but I hope we can have the whole house repapered and painted in a year or two."

"The figures are rather old-fashioned," said his mother, "but old fashions are coming round to be new fashions now."

"And it's awfully 'tony,'" said Rush, "to have your carpet too small for your room, leaving a space a foot or so wide around by the wall."

"And see," Letty laughed, gayly, "what small window-panes! The Lummells, in their new Queen Anne cottage, have some just such little scrimped-up panes, and think they are elegant."

"Children, we are in style, and it seems to me this place is going to be a little paradise! I like it — I like it extremely! Did you bring in my crutches, Rocket?"

In spite of all opposition, she was presently on her feet, — or rather on her one good foot and a crutch, — stepping about the house, giving instructions, and setting things in order with her own hands.

CHAPTER V.

THE FISH-OFFICER.

THE boys worked hard, delighted with the change, and inspired by youthful joy and hope.

They had taken the contract to supply rocket-sticks, pin-wheels, and other wooden fixtures for Cole & Co.'s fire-works, and orders for toys and dolls' carriages had been secured.

The mill met their most sanguine expectations. Much of the old machinery proved to be good, and their ingenious heads and skilful hands found little difficulty in adjusting to it their own special improvements in tools and apparatus. The future seemed bright with the promise of abundant, happy and prosperous employment.

The simple water-power was a joy to their hearts. The tide set back twice a day, and ebbing again gave, as Mr. Dushee had said, about eight hours of good running power out of every twelve. The occurrence of this period varied day after day; but they could easily accommodate their work to it, for

there would always be plenty of mere hand labor to do in the intervals of flood-tide and still water.

Two or three days after taking possession, while they were experimenting with the machinery, they received a call from Mr. Dushee. He came to inquire whether they had concluded to buy the horse and wagons; and the vast landscape of his countenance brightened when Mart said they would try to have the money ready for him the next day.

"I see you are making improvements," he remarked encouragingly, as he was about to go.

"A few changes seem necessary," Mart replied.

"One thing I am bound to have d-d-done," said Lute. "In place of these flash-boards we are going to have a p-p-permanent gate."

A cloud of slight embarrassment passed over the desert of a face.

"I would n't be in a hurry about that; I advise ye to wait and see how the flash-boards work."

"It is n't much trouble, I know," said Mart, "to go and put in the flash-boards when we want to start up the wheel; but what 's the use even of that? I think Lute is right."

"I 've already got a plan of a gate that will take c-c-are of itself," said Lute. "To be hung by the

top, so the tide running up will open it, and shut it r-r-running back."

"I had thought of something like that myself," said the former owner. "But," he added, with the air of one giving disinterested advice, "I think you 'll find it for your advantage to stick to the flash-boards. Any way, you 'd better wait awhile and see."

The boys laughed at what they called his "old-fogy notions" after he was gone; and Lute declared that, as soon as he could get around to it, he would certainly have his g-g-gate.

It was not long, however, before they learned that Mr. Dushee's counsel was good.

That afternoon a stranger in a narrow-seated buggy drove up to the mill. Rush came out of the upper story to meet him.

"I hear this property has lately changed hands," said the stranger, with an air of official authority.

"Yes, sir," replied Rush.

"Who are the present owners?"

"Well, it belongs to our family, — the Tinkham family."

"Where is the Tinkham family? I mean the head. I suppose there is a head somewhere."

The man spoke rather insolently, Rush thought, so that he was tempted to make a laughing reply.

"Yes, there are several heads; pretty good ones, too, some of us think. The property stands in my mother's name," he added, more soberly. "But my brothers have charge of the mill and the business."

"I want to see your brothers," said the man in the buggy. "Tell 'em I am a fish-officer. I come with authority from the fish commissioners to give due notice of the law and its penalties regarding obstructions in the way of migratory fish."

Rush did not feel like making a merry reply to that. His heart sank a little, as he said, —

"That is something I don't think they know anything about." He thought of the dam. "They are in the shop. Will you come in and see about the obstructions?"

The man got out of his buggy, followed Rush into the mill, and there delivered his errand to the oldest son.

Mart received it quietly, but Rush could see that he was taken by surprise.

"Is this a new thing?" he asked.

"Not at all; we have to attend to it every year," replied the officer. "The alewives will be running up the river in great numbers soon after the middle of the month, and they must have free passageway."

Mart was silent a moment, only a reddish suf-

fusion of his eyes betraying to Rush that the deputy's words had struck deep.

"Come out here and see my brother," he said.

It was high water, the ebb was just setting in, and Lute was on the platform over the dam, studying the probable working of his proposed tide-gate in some preliminary experiments with the flash-boards.

He was interrupted by the approach of his brothers with the stranger.

"I guess we 'll give up the idea of a gate for the present," said Mart, with his usual drawl. "This man has an argument against it. Fire it off for my brother's benefit, will you, Mr. Fish-officer?"

The deputy complied with cheerful glibness. Lute listened intently, having set the flash-boards to keep back the water. Then, having glanced at Mart's serious face, he turned his gleaming spectacles up at the officer.

"If this had happened three days ago," he remarked, "I should have said it was an April-f-f-fool!"

"Well, it is no April-fool," replied the deputy, "So *now* what do you say?"

"I say Mr. Dushee is a f-f-fraud!"

"He never said a word to one of us about a fish-way," Rush spoke up in great excitement.

"But he knows the need of it well enough, often as he has been warned," said the deputy.

"What has he done to keep within the law?" Mart inquired.

"There was only one thing to do. He has pulled out his flash-boards and let the fish run."

"But that destroys the water-power!"

"Exactly."

"How l-l-long?" stammered Lute.

"The law requires that streams shall be free for fish to run from the middle of April to the middle of June. The alewives go up into the pond to spawn. After that they descend the river again, and return to the sea."

Mart had by this time recovered from the consternation into which he had at first been thrown, and his ingenious mind was already seeing its way out of the difficulty.

"I should greatly enjoy cracking the Dushee cocoanut," he drawled, alluding in that irreverent way to the former owner's head-piece, "for not telling us about this fish business. But it is n't such a terrible matter, Lute. The fish go up with the tide, I believe?"

"The great mass of them," replied the deputy. "But a good many stragglers get caught by the ebb, and have to work their way against it."

"These flash-boards float with the flood-tide," said Mart, "and of course they 'll let the alewives run up with it. I guess they won't be seriously hindered, any of 'em. And by the time they have spawned, and are all ready to run down again, we 'll — "

"We 'll have a f-f-fish-way constructed!" broke in Lute, with a rapid stammer. "I 've got it already p-p-planned."

"That will be the best way," remarked the deputy. "In case of an impassable dam, the law requires the owner to build such a fish-way as the commissioners approve; or it requires them to build it, and charge the cost to him. Dushee thought it unnecessary, and preferred to keep his flash-boards open."

He added that he did not wish to be unduly strict with any man who was willing to comply with the law. Having thus performed his duty, he parted on very civil terms with the Tinkham boys, and rode away.

"We can get over this well enough," said Mart. "But I tell ye, I was in a pouring sweat for about a minute. I believe I lost about a pound of flesh."

"I wonder if there is anything else Dushee has kept back," said Rush, still excited. "I 'm afraid we don't yet know all his reasons for being so anxious to sell."

"I remember father used to say, 'A man always has two motives for every action, his real motive and his pretended motive,'" drawled Mart. "I 'm afraid Dushee is the kind of man he meant. What I 'm still more afraid of is, that we sha'n't be glad when we find all his reasons out."

"Anyhow," said Lute, "I 'm going to have my tide-gate all the same, soon as we 've b-b-built the fish-way."

As the dam was only two feet high, the fish-way — consisting of open water-boxes placed one above the other, so connected that the alewives could easily work their way up or down through them — seemed to be a simple and inexpensive affair.

So did the tide-gate. But there was a stronger argument against that than any the boys dreamed of yet.

CHAPTER VI.

THE ODD-LOOKING SUMMER HOUSE.

RUSH had been too busy to go off the place since the day of the moving. But after supper that evening, he and Letty and the two younger boys took a walk.

They strolled up the river as far as the bridge where they chanced to meet the elder Dushee, returning home from Tammoset.

Rush was inwardly boiling with indignation at the man's extraordinary economy of the truth regarding the alewife business in all his talks with the purchasers of the mill. But he controlled himself, and said quietly, in reply to Dushee's observation that 't was a pooty evenin' to be takin' a ramble, —

"You never mentioned to any of us that there might be some trouble about the alewives passing the dam."

"Trouble? trouble?" said Mr. Dushee, blandly. "Why, no! for I never believed there 'd be any trouble."

"You did n't know the fish commissioners would be after us, I suppose?"

Rush spoke with biting sarcasm. But the large, bland countenance remained undisturbed.

"Oh! there 's been an officer around, has they? I knew 't was about time. Comes every year. It 's his business. But that 's all 't amounts to."

"You have paid no attention to his warning?" said Rush.

"Skurcely," Dushee replied in a confidential way. "I 'd set my youngsters to watch for a few days when the fish was runnin' the thickest, and if they see the fish-officer a comin', I 'd jest pull up my flash-boards, and mabby leave 'em up till they see him go 'long down the river. That is, if I happened to be runnin' the wheel. But gener'ly I could git along without it for a part of the time; then I 'd let the fish run. The dam never was no hendrance to the alewives, and the officer knew it," the former owner added, seeing a wrathful light in the boy's eyes. "There never was no trouble, and there never need to be none."

"It seems to me you might at least have told us of anything of the kind that might turn up," Rush replied, in a rather choked voice; for it was all he could do to keep his anger from breaking forth.

"I s'pose I might," Dushee replied, cheerfully. "But I did n't think it necessary. There 's a good many little things about the mill you 'll have to find out for yourselves. If I can be of service to ye, le' me know."

Then, as Rush was walking silently away, the large-featured man repeated, with friendly persistence, "It 's a re'l pooty kind of an evenin' to be takin' a ramble," and went smiling home.

The snow had vanished from the hillsides and the ice from the lake. It was still evening, and the glassy water reflected the shores, the distant orchards and groves, and the rosy hues of the western sky.

The boys ran on toward the outlet, while Letty sauntered slowly, waiting for Rush.

"Oh, can't we have a boat ride?" she called to him, looking across the river, and seeing a skiff hauled up on the opposite bank.

"That's the first boat I've seen; I did n't know there was one on the river," said Rush. "Wait here, and I 'll try to get it."

He hurried back to the bridge, crossed over to a farm-house on the other shore, and was soon seen running down to the water's edge with a pair of oars.

"Go on up farther," he shouted, "and I 'll come over and take you all aboard."

READING ROOM

The current was running out, and he had to keep close by the bank and pull hard until he had succeeded in rowing the skiff up into still water. Then making a broad circuit above the outlet, leaving behind him lovely ripples which spread far away over the pink-tinted pond, he crossed to a pebbly beach, where Letty was waiting with the boys.

Eager for adventure, they scrambled aboard, and Rush pushed off again.

"This is better than the boat rides we used to have around the edge of the dirty old harbor," said Rupert.

"Oh, it is heavenly!" said Letty, who sometimes indulged in an almost too enthusiastic way of expressing herself. "Why isn't the water covered with boats? I should think it would be."

"I suppose it is too early in the season for them yet," replied Rush. "Mr. Rumney said he had only just got his into the water. That accounts for its leaking so. Look out for your feet, boys!"

"Let us row awhile, Rush," said Rupert, as they glided out toward the centre of the lake, which appeared like a vast gulf of infinite depth, illumined by soft and delicate hues, until broken by prow and oars.

Rush indulged them; they took each an oar, while

he assumed the place in the stern and steered, with a shingle for a rudder. Letty leaned over the bow, enjoying the lovely views.

"We 'll take mother out here when the weather gets a little warmer," said Rush. "I promised myself that, the first day I saw the lake. Won't she enjoy it?"

"I wish she was with us now!" exclaimed Letty. "It is too much for us alone!"

"We can row back and get her," said Rodman. "Can't we, Rupe?"

"Oh, yes, — it will be fine!" said Rupe.

It was not because the young Tinkhams were so much better bred or kinder hearted than many children, nor yet because their mother's crippled condition had called out their gentlest feelings toward her, but rather, I suppose, because she made herself so sympathetic and delightful a companion to them, that they constantly thought of her in this way.

But now all at once Rush had something else to attract his attention.

"Hello! there 's that odd-looking — summer house, Dick Dushee called it."

"What! that building on the shore?" said Letty. "Nobody would ever think of making such a summer house as that!"

"And only an idiot or a knave would call it one!" Rush exclaimed, flushing very red in the evening light. "Hold your oar, Rod! We'll run over and look at it."

Steering with his shingle, he headed the skiff toward the Tammoset shore and Dick Dushee's astonishing summer house.

"It's built on piles over the water," said Rupert. "And what's that before it?"

"A float," said Rush. "It's easy enough to see what the building is, and the rogue must have known!"

He was not long in surmising a reason for Dick's seemingly uncalled-for prevarication. What he had learned that afternoon made him suspicious of the Dushees.

"That's Dick Dushee there, with another boy, on the float," said Rupe.

"Pull away! I want to catch him before he gets off," said Rush, lowering his voice.

"What is the building, — if you know?" Letty asked, with excited curiosity.

"Nothing anybody need to lie about," Rush muttered, still with his angry flush on. "I'll tell you by and by. Dick!" he called, "see here a moment."

Dick was stepping up from the float into a large

open doorway in the barn-like end of the building, when, hearing the summons, he reluctantly faced about.

"This is your *summer house*, is it?" said Rush, sharply.

"I knew 't was some sort of a house to have fun in, — in summer," said Dick, with an ignoble grin, visible in the twilight. "I 've found out what it is, now."

"So have I, without any help from you," said Rush. "And, I 'm sorry to say, we 're finding out other things that don't reflect much credit on those who left us to discover them for ourselves."

"I don't know what you mean," said Dick.

Rush was flaming up for a fierce reply, when Letty stopped him.

"Don't have any words with him, Rocket!"

"Well, then, I won't. Not now. Hold on here a minute, boys!"

To satisfy himself with regard to the character and use of the ugly structure, he leaped to the float, mounted the steps, and entered the great doorway. In a little while he came out again, with a troubled but resolute look.

"How long has this been building?" he asked of Dick's companion on the float.

"Ever since last winter," was the reply. "They drove the piles through holes in the ice."

"Did you know then what it was for?"

"I guess so! Everybody knew. Anyhow, it had been talked of enough."

Rush gave Dick Dushee an annihilating look, but said nothing as he stepped back into the boat.

"Why, what is it troubles you so?" Letty asked, as they pushed off. "That boy told us what the house was for, when you were inside; but Rupert had already guessed."

"I should think anybody could guess!" said Rupert.

Rush declined to talk upon the subject as they returned along the shore to the river. After landing on Mr. Rumney's bank, he told Letty and the boys to walk along to the bridge, while he returned the oars.

Having thanked the farmer for them, he said, —

"Are there many boats owned here on the river?"

The farmer, standing in his open shed, filling his pipe, answered, good-naturedly, —

"Wall, consider'ble many; more 'n the' use' to be, nuff sight."

"And on the lake?" queried Rush.

"Wall, a consider'ble many on the lake. There 's been a kin' of a boom in the boatin' interest lately."

"How so?"

"Wall," replied Mr. Rumney, striking a match on his trousers, "for years there was no boatin' here, to speak on. But the notion on 't has broke out in a crop o' boys growin' up, — a perfect epidemic. 'Specially sence the Argue-not Club was started last summer, though why they call it the *Argue-not* beats me, for I never seen anything else there was so much arguin' about."

The smile that broadened the good-natured face betrayed some consciousness of a joke. Rush, however, took the matter with intense seriousness.

"This new building over here, on the shore of the pond, is the Argonaut Club's boat-house?"

Mr. Rumney nodded as he puffed at his pipe.

Rush then said, trying to suppress a tremor in his voice, —

"Has there been much trouble — about — boats passing — Mr. Dushee's dam?"

"Wall," said the farmer, smiling again, "since you ask me a candid question, I s'pose I must make a candid reply. There 's been some trouble. . I may say perty consider'ble trouble. They say the dam

has got to go. Your folks 'll have to know it, and ye may as well know it fust as last."

Rush constrained himself to say calmly, —

"Seems to me we ought to have known it a little sooner."

"'T would have been for your interest, no doubt," the farmer replied; adding, with a smile of the broadest humor, "if a man 's going to put on a stockin', and there 's a hornet's nest in it, he 'd naturally ruther like to know it 'forehand, — leastways, 'fore he puts his foot in too fur!"

"Naturally," said Rush. "It was the hornet's nest, as you call it, that made Dushee so anxious to sell?"

"Should n't wonder!" Mr. Rumney gave a chuckle, which had a disagreeable sound to the boy's ears. "Anyhow, he never said nothin' about sellin' till the Argue-nots argued him into it."

"My brothers came and talked with you before buying," said Rush. "Why did n't *you* tell them?"

"Wall, 't wa' n't my business. Dushee he come with 'em. Neighbors so, I did n' like to interfere and spile his trade."

In saying this, the worthy man appeared wholly unconscious of having acted in any but a fair and honorable way.

Something swelled alarmingly in Rush's throat, but he swallowed hard at it, and finally managed to say, "Thank you, Mr. Rumney."

He turned to go, paused, turned back, and hesitated a moment, as if struggling against a tumultuous inward pressure, an impulse to free his mind of some volcanic stuff. But he merely added, —

"Much obliged to you for the boat," and walked stiffly away.

CHAPTER VII.

THE BOYS IN COUNCIL.

RUPE and Rod ran on merrily down the bank, while Letty waited alone on the bridge, in the pleasant evening light, until Rush came out of Mr. Rumney's yard and joined her.

The innocent girl was thinking gratefully of the happy days which awaited them in that charming spot, with the lake so near and the river running by their door, delighting their eyes while it turned the mill, when a glance at Rush's perturbed face startled her from that bright dream.

"Rupe!" he cried, "go and find the boys, and tell them I want to see 'em. About something very particular."

Then, after the youngsters were gone, "I'll tell you all about it now," he said in answer to an eager inquiry from his sister. "I did n't want the boys to know, for we must keep it from mother."

He was in a fever of excitement. He took off his hat, to cool his brow in the dewy evening air, and

continued, while she listened with breathless interest, leaning by the rail of the bridge, —

"There 's a good reason why I did n't like the looks of that new building over on the pond! It 's the boat-house of a newly formed club, — the Argonauts."

"We knew it was a boat-house," said Letty. "But I don't see why it should trouble you."

"No, you don't take in the meaning of it," replied Rush. "But I did, as soon as I found out that Dick Dushee had thought it necessary to make up a fib about it. There 's a rage for boating, just now, here in Tammoset and Dempford."

"All the better," said Letty. "It will make things lively. We are to have a boat, too, you said yourself; and Lute has promised to make one."

"It would be all very well but for one thing," said Rush. "Many of the boats will be kept in the new boat-house and about the pond. Some belong down the river. And all will want to be passing up and down."

"I should think so," replied Letty, still failing to see the evil which cast so dark a shadow. "Why not?"

"There 's our mill-dam!" said Rush, in a low, intense whisper; and, as they walked on, he told

her all he had heard. "This was what made Dushee so rabid to sell."

"Oh, I see!" exclaimed Letty. "But the dam has a right to be there?"

"So Uncle Dave's lawyer told us; he looked into that matter when he examined the title to the property."

"He ought to know."

"Of course he knows. But he merely went to his law-books for his knowledge, probably. It 's a pity he did n't talk with the Dempford and Tammoset Argonauts!"

"Did n't any of you talk with anybody else?" poor, distressed Letty inquired.

"Why, yes; the boys, when they came up here with Uncle Dave, went and talked with Mr. Rumney He owns the land on the other side of the mill and up above here. He told them that keeping back the water did more good than harm to the land-owners, and he had never heard a complaint against it from one of 'em during the dozen years and more the dam has been there. But he never said a word about the boats. Neither did Dushee."

"Oh, dear! What can you do?"

"I have n't talked with Lute and Mart," replied Rush. "But since the law is on our side, and the

dam has a right to be there, and it is necessary to our business, — why, it would ruin us to take it away, — I know just what they will think."

"They will stand up for their rights," said Letty, pride in her strong, resolute brothers rising above her fears. "They are not cowards. Neither are you, Rush!"

"I should hope not," said Rush, with a nervous laugh. "We have mother to think of, you know. We have got all her money in this property, and we are bound to protect it for her sake, even more than our own."

"Can't you see some of the Argonauts, — if that 's what you call them, — and come to some agreement with them? I do so dread the thought of any trouble!" exclaimed Letty.

"So do I; and, of course, we shall get along peaceably with them if we can. But, by their driving Dushee to sell out, I judge that they 're pretty rough fellows. It won't do for them to be rough with us!" Rush added, with another excited laugh. "There come the boys."

Near the house they met the two oldest, sauntering along the walk. They had had a good day in the shop, notwithstanding the fish-officer's visit; and they were hopefully and tranquilly talking over their

plans in their mother's room, when they received Rush's message.

"How little they suspect!" whispered Letty.

"What 's up, Rocket?" Mart inquired, carelessly, resting one hand on his hip.

"Send back the boys," said Rush, in a low voice; for the two youngest were following. "I don't know, though; I suppose they may as well be told; but the whole thing must be kept from mother. Go in, Letty, and if she asks any questions, just say I wanted to talk about boats. She knows we think of building one."

"What have you f-f-found out?" said Lute. "Anything more about f-f-fish-officers?"

"Worse than that!" Rush replied. And there, on the high bank above the river, in the fading twilight, with his four brothers grouped about him for an audience, he told briefly his story.

After a few of their eager questions had been answered, Lute turned to the oldest and said, —

"It looks as if Dushee had let the knife into us middling d d-deep. Do you remember how the d-d-deed reads?"

"I 'm afraid there 's not over-much comfort for us in that," Mart replied. "It guarantees the title to the real estate, but merely assigns to us the right

he bought of Rumney to maintain a dam against his shore for ninety-nine years."

"That is, the right to maintain it if we c-c-can," said Lute.

"And we can," exclaimed Rush, "with the law on our side. And we will!"

"The law is a good thing to have on a man's side," Mart said. "But with a boat-club against us, made up of fellows from two towns, maintaining our right is n't going to be the smoothest job."

Rush had expected to see his brothers take a more determined attitude at the start, and this sort of talk disheartened him.

"Dushee is a villain!" he exclaimed, with burning resentment.

"Why don't you go right over and punch his head for him?" cried Rupert. "I would! I 'll take that Dick; and you see if I don't give him the worst pounding ever the mean son of a mean man had."

"Don't talk nonsense," said Lute. "P-p-punching and p-p-pounding won't do any good."

"No," said Mart. "And remember, you boys: we 've the right on our side, to begin with, and we 've got to move carefully, so as not to put ourselves in the wrong. So, just let Dick Dushee alone, and take care what you say to other people."

"That's the p-p-point," said Lute. "We are going to stand up for our rights, even if we have to fight for 'em. But we don't want to f-f-fight, unless we're f-f-forced to. Isn't that the ground, Mart?"

"Precisely," said Mart. "We've everything at stake here, and we're not to be scared. If the principal Argonauts are reasonable, right-minded fellows, it's likely we can make some amicable arrangement with them. If not —"

"I'd fight 'em!" said Rupe. "I think there'd be fun in it."

"There might be, if it wasn't for mother," said Mart. "She mustn't be troubled about this affair at all. Come, Lute."

"Where are you going?" Rush asked.

"To have a quiet and agreeable little chat with Dushee."

"Yes, let's w-wash our hands of him the f-f-first thing," Luke assented.

They started off, the younger boys following, intent on witnessing the sport.

"See here!" said Mart. "We're not going to battle. We don't need an army. Go back! But Rush can come along as far as Rumney's, where we shall stop to have a little talk first."

CHAPTER VIII.

A CALL ON DUSHEE.

THE elder Dushee was not pleasantly surprised when, that evening, there came a decided ring at the door of his new house on the Dempford side of the river, and, on opening it, lamp in hand, he looked out on the serious faces of the big Tinkham brothers.

It was hard to manufacture, at once, and on the spot, smile enough to cover that enormous blank countenance of his; but he struggled manfully at it, and invited them to "step in."

They stepped in accordingly, and remained quietly standing, while he placed the lamp on a table and offered them chairs.

"Re'l spring-like weather, now," he observed, hospitably. "Any news?"

"Y-y-yes, r-r-rather," said Lute, with gleaming spectacles. "Seems to be p-p-pretty good weather for news."

"You told our brother Rush this evening," said

Mart, "that there were some little things about the mill we should have to find out for ourselves."

"Yes, certainly."

There was hardly smile enough to go around among the Dushee features; but the mouth made the most of its share, and grinned persistently.

"And we 're f-finding 'em out," said Lute.

"But we thought," Mart added, in his driest manner, "that it might simplify matters if you would be a little more liberal with your information."

"Truth is a p-p-precious thing, we know," struck in the other's rapid stammer. "But a man should n't be too s-s-saving of it. And if you 'll waste a little on us, now that it can't hurt your trade, we 'll be ob-b-liged to you."

If there was any humor in their way of introducing the business that brought them, not the least consciousness of it was betrayed by either of the boys; and surely Mr. Dushee was in no mood to appreciate it. There was a rather grim earnestness in their manner which to him foreboded unpleasant things.

"Better set down," he said, as they remained standing. "Truth about what?"

"About the trouble you 've had with the boat-club, and the probable amount in pickle for us," said

Mart. "You've played a sharp game on us, Mr. Dushee; but we have n't come to make any unnecessary comments on that. The important thing now is, to know what we're to expect from the Argonauts."

"Wall, I d'n' know. Better set down," said Dushee, with a stammer that rivalled Lute's. "I guess you 'll git along with 'em. You 're new men. There won't be the prejudice agin you there has been agin me."

"Mr. Rumney says you 've had your flash-boards broken and parts of the dam torn out more than once. How is it?" Mart inquired.

"*He* told you that?" said Dushee, quickly.

"Yes; but not till after you had made your trade. He was careful about that. Now fork out the facts," Mart added, with his most deliberate drawl, "and oblige."

"I *have* had a little trouble with some of 'em," Dushee admitted, after urging his visitors again to "set down." "There was skurce a boat on the river, 'cept now and then one goin' up into the pond, fishin', not for years. I could always 'commodate 'em, and nobody never questioned my right to have a dam there."

"N-n-nobody?" said Lute.

"Nobody!" Dushee repeated, with emphasis — "Better set down. — Not for a dozen years at least. Then a passel of boys, that was in baby-frocks when I built it, they 'd growed up to feel smart and think they owned all creation. They must have their boats; and, if I was n't on hand to pull up my flash-boards for 'em, they had no more sense than to go to smashin' things. Come! won't ye set down?"

"Guess not," said Mart. "We 're like the boy that went visiting with his mother, and when she kept asking him at the table, 'Can't ye eat a little more, sonny? can't ye eat a little more?' 'Mabby I could,' says he, 'if I stood up.' We can take in your facts best standing. And as we don't mean to intrude on your hospitality again, we want a full meal this time."

This was said with such solemn deliberation that when Mr. Dushee tried to receive it as a joke his forced laugh sounded strangely out of place.

"Why did n't you tell us this when we first asked about the d-d-dam?" Lute inquired.

"I d'n' know; I wa' n't bound to. Every man in business has his enemies and his little troubles, and you don't s'pose he 's goin' to make out a list of 'em when he comes to sell out, do ye?"

"Little troubles is g-g-good," said Lute.

"Of course," said Dushee. "This boatin' fever 'll die down about as sudden as it come up; storm 'll blow over in a little while, and you 'll be all right."

"Did n't you have to keep your flash-boards open half the time last summer?" Mart demanded.

"Wall, I did keep 'em open a little more 'n I wanted to, I allow."

"And did n't you keep your dam from being destroyed at last by promising, if the Argonauts would leave it for you to use after the boating season was over, you would make some different arrangements before spring?"

"Wall, I *have* made different arrangements," said Dushee.

"Yes, you 've sold the property to us," Mart replied, with his usual drawl, but with a dangerous light in his eyes. "*Without incumbrance,* you said, but I call a fight like this with two towns the biggest sort of an incumbrance."

"We 've got about as much satisfaction as I expected," said Lute. "When a man deliberately swindles a widow and her boys in this way, it 's like exp-p-postulating with a hyena to call him to an account for it. But there 's another thing we came to say.

"Yes," Mart added. "I told you to-day that we would take the horse and wagons and things at your price. But now we think differently."

"You back down?" cried Dushee.

"We b-b-back down," said Lute. "A man may overreach us once. But we're fools if we let him overreach us tw-twice."

"But he's a good, sound horse!" Dushee protested.

"He may be," Lute answered. "But it will take more than your word to convince us there is n't some inc-c-cumbrance on him."

"We don't want anything more to do with you, or any more of your property," said Mart. "Come and take it away."

"And another thing," Lute added, as they were about to go. "Come and get your property, as my b-b-brother says. But after that, if I catch you on our place again, I 'll pick you up and throw you into the w-w-water."

As Dushee was about twice as big as the boy of nineteen who made this threat, it would have sounded laughable enough if anybody there present had been in a laughing humor.

As for Dushee, he was in a blustering rage by this time. He threatened, at first, to sue the widow for

the price of the horse and wagons; then he taunted the boys with their smartness in putting into the market dolls' carriages that crowded his cut.

"You're welcome to make 'em now, at any price," he roared after them as they walked out of the door. "But you've somebody else besides me to compete with. You've got the Argynots to compete with! Compete with them!"

They kept their temper pretty well, considering the circumstances, and went slowly away, without deigning any further reply.

It had been, on the whole, an unfortunate visit, and they had the poor satisfaction of feeling that they had gained nothing by it but an enemy, against the day when they were to have enemies enough and to spare.

They had gained two enemies, in fact; young Dick Dushee, who had stood in the background during the interview, counting henceforth for one.

CHAPTER IX.

IN THE WILLOW-TREE.

THE next morning the boys went quietly about their work, wisely resolved not to borrow trouble, but to await developments, and make the best of things.

They started up the mill, and the rush of the water-wheel, the clank and whir of the machinery, and the noise of the jig-saw and lathe made the music their hearts loved.

Early in the forenoon Mr. Dushee came over with Dick, hitched the horse to the wagon, loaded up the extra pieces of harness, the blankets and robes, with other articles, and took the buggy in tow. They said nothing to anybody ; but Dick glared insolently at Rupe and Rod, who were digging in the garden, and snatched from their hands the rake and fork they were using, these being among the effects which the Tinkhams had finally declined to purchase.

"Don't say a word to him!" Rupe charged his brother, who was inclined to resent this rudeness.

"Mart carried her across the plank."— Page 75.

"They're welcome to their old traps; we don't want 'em."

This was said loud enough for the Dushees to hear, while Rupe bestowed on Dick a look of defiant scorn.

The Dushees drove away with their miscellaneous possessions, and a few minutes later Rupe and Rod were on their way to the village, with money Mart had given them to buy the garden tools they needed.

The next day was Sunday; and in the afternoon Mrs. Tinkham made her first visit to the seats in the willow-tree over the river.

Mart carried her across the plank in his strong and tender arms, and placed her where the best views were to be had, while Letty followed with a shawl to wrap around the delicate shoulders. The sun was shining, but there was a chill in the air.

There was room on the benches for the whole family, though Mart remained leaning against one of the great branches, and Rod chose to perch himself on a limb.

Lute had a newspaper, and Letty had brought a book from which to read aloud to her mother. But book and newspaper were forgotten in the charm of the situation and the pleasant communion which united the hearts of mother and children.

"Mr. Dushee must be a man of some taste," said the widow, looking delightedly around, "or he never would have put these seats here in this old tree."

"I fancy he has about as much taste as his old roan horse has," replied Mart. "He used to have a partner in the business, who lived in the house here with him; and it 's to him and his young wife that we owe these and some other pleasant things."

"Speaking of the horse," said his mother, "I can't understand why you concluded so suddenly not to buy him, after I had given my consent."

"We have n't much c-c-confidence in Dushee," remarked Lute, who had pulled off his spectacles to read his newspaper, but now put them on again to look about him. "He would never let on, if the horse's legs were c-c-covered with spavins and ring-bones."

"Besides, we shall probably want to use all our spare cash in establishing ourselves here," said Mart, thinking of their rights to be maintained and perhaps fought for. "Then there will be a satisfaction in buying a better horse, and new wagons and things, when we can afford them."

"A wise conclusion, I've no doubt," said his mother. "Rocket, I do think it was a happy inspiration that made you hunt up this place and insist on

our buying it! Doesn't it seem, children, as if it had been made and kept for us, just as Rocket said?"

The older boys did not respond to this sentiment so promptly as might have been expected, the consciousness of an important secret kept from her, and of troubles in store of which she did not dream, tying their tongues.

But Rush spoke up earnestly, "I hope you will always think so, mother." And Letty, to the relief of her brothers, began to expatiate on the beauties of the place, in her extravagant, girlish way.

"I was sorry to take you children out of school," the widow said. "But I am told the schools here are as good as those in town, and you, Letty, shall begin to go at the commencement of the next term along with Rupe and Rod."

"I want to stay at home and work in the garden," said Rod. "We are going to raise flowers and corn and potatoes and peas and beans and strawberries and everything."

"You shall have work enough in the garden," said Mart; "all you hanker for, I 'll warrant."

"What a blessed day of rest this is!" said the mother, "after the turmoil of moving and getting settled! It seems as if there was nothing now to mar our perfect enjoyment."

"N-n-nothing!" stammered Lute, taking off his glasses again to look at the newspaper, but thinking all the while of the menaced dam.

"I 'm only afraid you 'll work too hard, boys," she went on. "You 've been looking rather careworn for a day or two ; and I don't like to see it."

"We 've had a good many things to think of," drawled Mart, glancing from under his contracted brows at some object down the river.

"Too many!" exclaimed the mother. "I think some are unnecessary. The boat, for instance, which you talk of making. Don't think of that at present."

"We shall want a boat," said Lute, carelessly. "There 's a new boat-club here in town, and we may wish to j-j-join it."

"Why, yes," returned the mother; "it will be pleasant to be on good social terms with the young men."

"V-v-very," said Lute. "We hope to be."

"There comes a boat, now!" cried Letty, her eye having followed Mart's down the river. "Two of them!"

"Three!" called Rod from his perch on the limb, as a third boat hove in sight around the bend below the mill.

"How charming they look!" exclaimed the mother.

"L-l-lively!" said Lute, peering anxiously through his glasses.

"They are the first of the season," said Rush. "They are coming up with the tide."

The flash-boards were up, yielding a free passage to the boats, the foremost of which, impelled by sturdy oars, came gliding through.

"If it was a week day, and the mill was going, I don't see how they would pass the dam," Mrs. Tinkham observed, looking down on the boatmen, who, in their turn, looked up at the group in the tree.

"Sunday is the time for them," said Mart. "And they'll naturally come at flood-tide, when the flash-boards are always open, whatever the day."

Then, without giving her time to reflect that the boats would probably be returning with the ebb, and that on working days they would find the passage in the dam closed, he added, —

"I'm afraid it's a little cool for you, mother. I don't want you to take cold the first time; for I expect you will pass whole days here when the weather is warm and the trees are in foliage."

"But you are not going to take me in so soon!" she said, entreatingly, as if she had been the child and he the parent.

"I think I'd better." And he put his arms about her.

"Oh, yes; we'll all go," said Letty, at a hint from Rush.

There was something in the appearance of one of the boats which the boys did not like; and if their mother was to be spared all knowledge of the threatened troubles, it was high time that she should be got out of the way.

CHAPTER X.

THE ENCOUNTER AT THE DAM.

THE first boat, having passed the dam, stayed its oars. The second likewise slackened speed, and drifted with the current abreast of the mill, while the third boat came up.

In the bow of this boat was a burly fellow, whom we may as well introduce to the reader.

He was a Dempford boy, named Buzrow, son of a Buzrow whom nobody we can hear of ever knew, but who was popularly supposed to have possessed prodigious strength. Tradition declared him to have been double-jointed, or "double-j'inted," as the boys had it; and there was a story that he had once knocked down a cow with his fist.

Milton Buzrow — for that was the son's name; though why a Buzrow who could knock down cows with his fist should honor a poet by calling a child after him, admits of some speculation — Milton, I say (commonly called Milt), was hardly yet twenty years old; but, in addition to the honor of being the son of the cow-smiter, he also enjoyed a reputa-

tion for tremendous physical prowess. He made no claim to being, like the mythical Buzrow, double-j'inted, but his style of conversation clearly showed that he regarded the knocking down of cows as an act of heroic manhood to which he, too, might, in due time, aspire.

Such a Buzrow was naturally a leader among a certain class of boys ; and that he did not often lead them into ways of peace and quietness need hardly be said. He was one of the Dempford Argonauts, and, we must add, not one of the mildest-mannered and most modest of those young gentlemen, by any means.

It was Milt Buzrow who had made a braggart vow, at a meeting of the club in November, that if Dushee's mill-dam remained to obstruct their navigation of the river until after he had got his boat into the water in the spring, he, for one, would proceed, in open daylight, to do it some dreadful damage.

Spring was now here, and here was the mill-dam. Here, also, this Sunday afternoon, when he might have been better employed, was Milt Buzrow in his boat. Would he dare to execute his threat ?

That became an exciting question to his mates, seeing that he had no longer a timid and crafty

Dushee to deal with, but three stalwart-looking lads watching him from the tree.

He had committed himself, however, to an act of aggression, and it would never do to have it said that a Buzrow had backed out of anything because he was afraid.

The dam was a simple structure; strong stakes driven into the river-bed, with closely fitting horizontal planks nailed to them, over a mud-sill across the bottom of the river.

Buzrow had two of his trusty followers with him, and as they kept the boat in place with their oars, he hauled up a crow-bar from the bow, where he braced himself, and began to strike the point of it against the planks.

He was striking and wrenching, and a plank was beginning to splinter, when somebody in the other boat whispered, "Look out! there comes one of 'em!" and Buzrow, glancing up from his work, saw Lute.

At the first movement of the iron bar, the second son had slipped from the tree down the bank, and sprung to the platform over the Tammoset end of the dam.

"See here, young man!" he called out, "you are a stranger to me, and I am not aware that I ever d-d-did you any harm."

His manner was not at all menacing, and Buzrow inferred that he could treat his stammer, and his spectacles, and his wise-looking old-young face with contempt, all the more safely because he himself was on the opposite side of the flash-board opening, about ten feet off.

"No, you n-n-never have," the son of the cow-smiter replied, with a mock stutter which greatly delighted his associates. "But this dam has, and I promised Dushee that if it stayed here till spring it would get smashed."

"But Dushee has nothing more to do with it," struck in another voice; and there were two Tinkhams on the platform.

The second was Rush, who had stopped to snatch up a bean-pole, and now stood grasping it, while he joined his remonstrance to Lute's.

As there was nothing at all comical about his determined manner and blazing eyes, Buzrow deemed it worth while to treat him with rather more respect, especially as the pole was a dozen feet long.

"I don't know anything about that," he deigned to respond; then with a whisper to his oarsmen, "Get a little farther out of his reach."

"But you *ought* to know about it, before you go

to destroying our property!" said Rush. "We did n't suppose this dam injured any one, when we bought it. We have come here to get an honest living, in peace with our neighbors, if we can."

"That you can't, as long as you keep a dam here," said a man in one of the other boats. "We have no quarrel with you, and don't want to have. But if you think you are going to step into Dushee's place, and do what he found to his cost that he could n't, you 're mightily mistaken."

"All we want to do," said Lute, "is to carry on our lawful b-b-business; and that we 've a p-p-perfect right to do."

"We don't want to interfere with your business or injure you in any way," said Buzrow. "But you have no more right to keep a dam here than you have to put a gate across the highway. That 's all there is about that."

Having got well beyond sweep of the bean-pole, he gave startling emphasis to these words by striking another blow with his bar.

"Break that dam," cried Rush, lifting the pole, and standing ready to leap from the platform into the river, "and I 'll break your head!"

By that time there was a third Tinkham on the spot, namely, Mart, with two more younger ones

hastening to bring clubs and brick-bats from the shed.

"Give me room, boys," said Mart. "No, Rocket, I don't want your pole. Don't fling any of those missiles, boys!"

He stepped to the end of the platform, and stood there weaponless, his right hand clinched and resting on his hip, in a favorite attitude, the other hanging loosely by his side; rather thin of face and lank of form, but of goodly height, long-limbed and athletic, and with an eye like a hawk's as he looked over at Buzrow and his iron bar.

CHAPTER XI.

REASON VERSUS CROW-BARS.

RUSH and his bean-pole had startled the Argonauts into paying very respectful attention to what the oldest brother had to say.

"We're peaceable folks here," said Mart, "or at least we try to be. It 's Sunday, and we don't want a row. But, my friend," addressing Buzrow, "if you must be swinging that piece of iron, I 'd rather you would n't swing it in the direction of our dam."

Buzrow held the bar, looking rather foolishly from the array of Tinkham boys to his own companions; while Mart proceeded, —

"Whoever fancies we are going to stand quietly by and see our property destroyed has very erroneous ideas of human nature. It may as well be understood first as last that we can't have that."

As Buzrow had desisted from belligerent action, he seemed to think it necessary to make some defiant remark instead.

"The dam is a nuisance, and it 's got to go."

"It is n't a nuisance to us," replied Mart. "We bought the mill in good faith, without knowing that anybody had ever objected to the dam. Now we are willing to consider objections in a liberal spirit; and we ask you, on your part, to consider our position, our honest intentions in coming here, and our wish to do the fair and square thing by everybody."

"It 's easy to talk," replied Buzrow, who had, however, laid down his bar. "Dushee could do that. But we've had enough of it. All is, our boats must n't be hendered by this dam."

"The flash-boards are out. You have a free passage. And we 'll take 'm out for you any time when they happen to be in. What more do you want? Whatever your rights may be," Mart continued, "you 're not going just the right way to work to secure them. When you come up here in your boat, and find an opening in the dam ten feet wide to let you through, and, instead of taking advantage of it, turn out of your course and stop to batter down the dam, any man with half a teacupful of brains could tell you that you 're laying yourself liable to a prosecution."

"You can prosecute," muttered Buzrow. "The law ain't all on your side, you 'll find out. Other folks have taken counsel on this subject."

"I suppose the law will have to decide this thing finally," said a young man in the first boat, which had floated a little way up the river, but now returned to the scene of the encounter. "Come along, boys! Don't do anything more."

"I don't intend to do anything more to-day," said Buzrow, glad of an excuse to withdraw from an undertaking which was becoming formidable. "I 've done all I set out to. But," he added, shaking his fist at the dam, — a fist, by the way, which looked as if it might be a good copy of the one that had knocked down a cow, — "before another Sunday, that will all be ripped out! Jest you remember that!"

Mart gave no heed to this menace, but said calmly, addressing the young man in the first boat, who appeared to be a person of influence, —

"You will always find the flash-boards up on Sunday, — a day on which I should think any disturbance of this kind might be avoided by decent people."

"I don't belong to the decent sort, I suppose," said Buzrow, in a coarse, jeering way.

"For the rest," Mart went on, still addressing the young man and ignoring Buzrow, "come to us on a week day, as one man should go to another when there's a conflict of interest between them, and

we 'll meet you more than half-way in making any necessary arrangements to accommodate both parties."

"That 's fair," said the young man, who seemed to have entered unwillingly into the controversy, and to find it very disagreeable. He had good manners and a fine face, from which no conduct that was not handsome and honorable could well be expected. "I 'm as sorry as you can be that there 's any trouble about the dam ; but I 'm afraid it has gone so far now that the law will have to settle it."

"Very well ; the law let it be," said Mart. "It 's a miserable weapon for people of sense and right intentions to resort to ; but it 's better than crow-bars and bean-poles."

"I am sorry our fellows have disturbed you today," said the young man, appearing himself very much disturbed.

"I am sure you are," said Mart, cordially; "whether you could have prevented them in the first place, I won't inquire."

"Perhaps I might," the young man admitted, "but I did n't. The truth is, we all feel that we have a natural right to go up and down the river in our boats, whether the law allows you to dam it or not. We were greatly annoyed by Dushee's shabby

"His boat then led the way up the river."— Page 91.

treatment of us last year, and you must n't be surprised at any violence of feeling in opposition to the dam."

"I see how the matter stands," replied Mart. "You may be sure that, if we had any suspicion of it before we came here, we never should have come. But now that we are here, does n't it seem as if well-meaning fellows, such as you seem to be, and as my brothers and I certainly are, — does n't it seem as if we might settle our differences without lawyers or crow-bars?"

"It does seem so," the young man replied. "Our club meets to-morrow evening, and I shall then lay the subject before them and report what you propose."

"I hope you will not only report it," said Mart, "but advocate it, as I am sure you can. A word in season from the right person may save a world of trouble, to your side as well as ours."

"That 's a fact," said the young man, his brow clearing of its cloud. "I 'll do my best, but I can't promise that will be much."

His boat then led the way up the river, followed by the two others, Buzrow still muttering vengeance against the dam as his boat passed through.

"Who is that young fellow in the farther boat, —

the one I talked with?" Mart then inquired of Dick Dushee, who had come down to the Dempford side of the river to see the fun.

"That," said Dick, who was evidently disappointed that the two parties had separated without affording him more sport, — "that's Lew Bartland. He's commodore of the club."

"I like him!" said Mart, turning to his brothers. "If we've got the commodore on our side — and I believe we have — we are all right."

CHAPTER XII.

THE COMMODORE'S COURTESY.

AGAIN, the next morning, the Tinkham boys went about their business as if there had been no cloud of trouble in their sky. The two oldest set to work on the dolls' carriages, for which the spring weather was sure to bring a brisk demand. The two youngest were happy with their new garden tools and a quart of peas Mart had given them to plant. Rush had also a pleasant task, well suited to his hands. To him was assigned the making of the rocket-sticks and pin-wheels for Cole & Co.'s fire-works. The stuff had been brought by express, and enough got ready so that he could set the jig-saw running early in the forenoon.

Soon after, two young girls drove into the yard, in a handsome top-buggy, and looked about them with lively curiosity, as the sleek and well-groomed horse fell into a slow walk along the gravel path.

"I wonder if I had better leave it at the door," said one, who held the slack reins.

"My, Syl Bartland!" said the other; "what do you want to leave it there for! Only women folks are in the house, and I want to see some of the boys."

"There are two at work over there in the corner of the garden," said Syl. "We might call one of them, and give it to him. Would you, Mollie?"

"Those little fellows! No, indeed!" cried Mollie. "I want to see the big ones the boys told about. There are six or eight of them in all, they say, and it must have been splendid when one of them was going to knock Milt Buzrow on the head with a bean-pole."

"I almost wish he had," said Syl. "I hate that great, coarse Buzrow."

"So do I. But they've no business to keep a dam here, for all that. Do you remember, Kate Medway and I came up in our boat last summer, and when we were going back we could n't pass the dam, and that miserable old Dushee kept us an hour before he would come and pull up his flash-boards. It was awfully mean!"

Mollie lowered her voice as she spoke the last words, for the horse had turned up to the mill and stopped.

"They are in there at work," Syl Bartland whis-

pered, with a mischievous laugh. "Now, if you really want to see them, you can take it in to them."

"What are you talking about?" giggled the other. "I am not going into that old mill, where there are half a dozen young men I never saw before!"

"But you said you wanted to see them. I never saw such a girl as you are, Mollie Kent! Well, hold the horse, and I 'll beard the lions in their den."

The weather was warm, and Rush, in his shirt-sleeves, with a paper cap on his head, looking very workman-like, was running his jig-saw, when a rustling of the shavings on the floor caused him to glance around.

He was surprised to see a young girl coming toward him; her rosy face in a cavalier hat, and a billet in the gloved hand which she held out to him.

"Are you the Tinkham Brothers?" she asked, archly, the rosebud of a mouth looking very much as if it wanted to blossom into a smile.

"I am one of them," he answered, awkwardly conscious of his paper cap and shirt-sleeves.

"Here is a note from my brother. He asked me to bring it over, so that he might be sure you received it before evening."

He took the billet, and was thanking her with a

blush, which well became his fresh and pleasant face when she interrupted him with, "Oh, there's no occasion for that!" tripped out of the shop, stepped lightly into the buggy on the bank, and, taking the reins from her companion's hand, drove away.

As soon as they were out of hearing, her suppressed laughter broke forth.

"It was just fun," she said. "They are the tamest lions ever you saw! I gave it to the one that shook the bean-pole over Milt's cranium; I know it was he, from Lew's description."

"What did he look like?" Mollie inquired, enviously.

"Handsome as a picture! Clear red-and-white! And did n't he blush beautifully, in his paper cap," giggled Syl, "when I gave him the letter?"

"Why did n't you make him come out and help you into the buggy, so I could see him?" Mollie demanded. "Syl Bartland, you're as mean as you can be!"

Rush, meanwhile, having seen the surprising little vision disappear, opened the unsealed note and glanced his eye over it as he carried it to his brothers.

"It 's from the commodore," he said, handing it to Mart, — "Lewis Bartland."

"The commodore!" said Lute. "Who was that g-g-girl?"

"His sister, I suppose."

"By G-g-george, she's a p-p-pretty one! Why did n't she hand the note to me?"

"Because you are not good-looking enough," laughed Rush. "What is it all about, Mart?"

"Now, this is what I call doing the handsome thing," said Mart, with a smile of satisfaction. "I knew there was a gentleman in the commodore's suit of clothes, and this proves it."

"Let's have the p-p-proof," said Lute.

"He writes that a number of boats will be going up the river this evening to the new club-house, where the members are to meet; and he suggests that it will have a good effect if we give them free way."

"Certainly," cried Rush; "though he need n't have taken the trouble to ask it. They will be going up with the tide, and returning later in the evening, when the flash-boards will be up."

"But it's kind in him to make the suggestion," said Lute, reading over the letter in his turn. "It shows his g-g-good-will."

"If the Argonauts were all like him," said Mart, "there would be nobody for us to have any row

with. I'd accommodate their boats, if I had to stand at the dam whenever one appeared, and carry it over on my shoulders. Though the law is with us, they 've got a side, and I respect it."

"So do I, when they respect our side," replied Rush. "But I can't hold my hands in my pockets and see them battering the dam with a crow-bar, as long as any of Dushee's old bean-poles are lying about."

"I'm glad you did n't strike the fellow," observed Mart.

"So am I," added Lute. "As father used to say an ounce of p-p-persuasion is worth a p-p-pound of opposition."

The reception of the commodore's courteous note was a cheering incident to the boys in their present state of suspense. And it was evident that they thought no worse of him for the glimpse they had had of his sister.

With the flood-tide that evening, the boats of the Dempford Argonauts passed the mill on their way to the new club-house on the lake. The Tinkham boys kept out of sight, but they were nevertheless near at hand, and on the watch for any demonstration against the dam.

There was loud talk in one of the boats, and the

Buzrow voice was heard repeating the threat of yesterday, that it (the dam, of course) was "a nuisance," and had "got to go." But no crow-bar was used, and no harm done.

Then the Tinkhams awaited with some anxiety the return of the boats.

The Argonauts, meanwhile, from down the river and about the lake, as well as from more inland parts of the two towns, assembled at the new club-room. This comprised the upper story of the "odd-looking summer house," the lower story being designed for boats, — the lighter ones, like the canoes and wherries, to be placed on racks and brackets, the heavier ones to be floated under the floor and made fast to rods and rings.

At one end of the room, young Commodore Lewis Bartland sat at a table with the secretary of the club, while the other members, to the number of about thirty, occupied chairs and benches, or stood leaning against the wall.

At the end of the building, beyond the table, was a balcony overhanging the starlit lake; and there, outside, at the open door and window, were also two small groups of Argonauts, enjoying their cigars and the night air, and, when they chose, listening to the debates.

Other business having been first transacted, the commodore rose, rapped for silence, and addressed the club. He looked very handsome, with the light from the lamp on the table before him shining full upon his white forehead and finely cut features; and his speech was calm and persuasive. He gave a concise history of the mill-dam troubles, stating the side of the Argonauts quite to their satisfaction. "But," he went on, after the applause which greeted that portion of his remarks had ceased, "we must n't forget that there is another side to this controversy. The new mill-owners have a side, and we are bound to respect it."

Dead silence followed this announcement. The youthful commodore felt at once that the club was no longer with him, and that the position he had determined to take would be unpopular.

But he stood up to it manfully.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE ARGONAUTS IN COUNCIL.

"WE have no longer the party to deal with that we had last year. They did not put the dam there; and if they had known anything of its history, they would never have bought the mill. So they say, and I believe them."

There was a murmur of assent.

"Dushee deceived and imposed upon them," the speaker continued, "as he so often deceived and imposed upon us. So, I say, instead of regarding them as enemies, we should look upon them as fellow-victims, and do what we can for them in their dfficulty."

"That's so," cried somebody in a far-off corner. There was also a vigorous hand-clapping in the same direction, but it was limited to one or two persons, and was not taken up by the club. Lew Bartland went on, warming more and more.

"They have come here for the water-power which the dam gives them, and have probably paid a good deal more for the place than it would be worth to anybody if the water-power was taken away. As I

understand, they are sons of a poor widow, — mere boys, like the most of us here. That ought to enlist our sympathies in their behalf. They are struggling to get a living for her and for themselves, in a perfectly honest, upright, legitimate way. Is n't that something for us to consider?"

"That was Dushee's claim. We did n't consider that," said a voice at the window, where several heads were looking in from the balcony.

"But we would — or, at least, we should — have considered it," said the commodore, "if Dushee had treated us fairly, as I believe these young men are ready to do. He never kept his word with us, — promising one thing and then doing another that suited his convenience better. We lost patience with him, and I was as ready as any of you to sweep the dam away and then let the law settle the matter."

"That 's what we 've got to do now," said the voice at the window.

"Possibly," replied the commodore, turning in that direction and showing his fine profile to the benches. "But what I insist upon is, that we ought first to talk with these young men, see what they propose to do, and give them such a chance as we should wish anybody to give us if we were in their place."

As he sat down, a little fellow from one of the benches jumped up. I say little fellow, because in stature he was hardly more than five feet. But he was one of the oldest members of the club, and he carried himself as if he had been fully seven feet tall.

"Mr. Webster Foote," said the commodore, recognizing him.

Tremendous applause. Mr. Webster Foote, of Dempford, — or Web Foote, as the boys called him, because he was so fond of the water, — was evidently popular, and very well aware of the pleasing fact. He had been a rival candidate for the office of commodore at the time of Lew Bartland's election, and had been defeated by only three votes. He was not, personally, so well liked as Lew, but he had been all along one of the most active and outspoken enemies of the dam, and had gained favor by encouraging the prejudice against it.

It was generally thought that he still aspired to Lew's place. Certain it was that, whenever any plan of the commodore's could be opposed with any show of reason or hope of success, he was sure to lead an opposition. And now the good-natured Bartland had laid himself open to attack.

Mr. Webster Foote tossed off the black hair from

his forehead, and stood waiting for the applause to subside, looking about him with a smile of lofty conceit.

"Straight as a cob!" whispered a Tammoset boy in the far-off corner.

"So straight he leans over backward," remarked another Tammoset boy in reply.

"He 's little, but, oh, jiminy!" said a third, with an ironical chuckle.

Some of the Tammoset Argonauts, it may be said, were lukewarm on the subject of the dam, which they rarely had occasion to pass, and they were inclined to make fun of Mr. Web Foote, of Dempford.

"Our worthy commodore," the speaker began in high-keyed, oratorical tones of voice, "has made a novel suggestion. He has enlightened us on one point. I thank him for it."

This complimentary form of phrase would have surprised his followers but for the sarcastic emphasis with which the short, sharp sentences were uttered.

"I am sure," he went on, his oratory increasing in shrillness and vehemence, "it never would have occurred to one of us humble members of the club that we owe sympathy and friendship to the owners

of the dam, instead of opposition. We have no right to go up and down the river in our boats; or, if we have, we ought to give it away to these honest, upright, dearly beloved strangers."

There was a laugh of approval, while a cloud of impatience darkened the commodore's face.

"They have come here to carry on a business of vast importance. I hear they make dolls' carriages, for one thing. The world can't do without dolls' carriages. The world is suffering for the want of dolls' carriages. Europe stretches out its arms to America," — Mr. Web Foote tossed back his hair and extended his own small members to illustrate the attitude of Europe in that dramatic particular, — "and beseeches us for dolls' carriages. And, of course, only the Tinkham Brothers' dolls' carriages will do."

Shouts of laughter greeted this part of the speech, but no smile broke through the cloud on Lew Bartland's face.

"We have been laboring under a great mistake, gentlemen of the club. The river was n't made for us common folks. It is not a natural highway. No boat has any right upon it; but the fresh water comes down, and the tides ebb and flow, solely for the benefit of the mill and its precious proprietors."

Cries of "Good! good!" with a noisy stamping of feet on the new floor.

"Of course, there's no other place in the world where they can get a living. But if we want to boat up and down a river, why don't we go to some other river? There are plenty of rivers in the world! What are we dallying around here for?"

Amidst the general laughter, even the commodore had to smile, Web's mock argument was so amusingly absurd.

"There are five or six boys of them, I hear, and a widow. Think of that! A widow! There are only about forty members of this club; and what are forty miserable Argonauts, with their sisters and sweethearts, who sometimes go boating with them — what are we, with our paltry interests and pleasures, compared with those five or six makers of dolls' carriages and a widow thrown in? Of course, we are of no importance. We may as well give up our boats. And, perhaps, it would be a handsome thing to offer this boat-house, which would then be of no more use to us, to the Tinkham Brothers, as a storehouse for dolls' carriages. How would you like that?"

Web Foote tossed back his hair and sat down, amidst a roar of merriment. That having subsided

a little, all eyes turned upon the commodore, who was expected to reply.

He rose slowly to his feet, and said with simple dignity, —

"The remarks we have just listened to would be highly diverting if this did not happen to be a serious subject. I am not aware that I have proposed anything so very unreasonable. Can't we imagine ourselves in the place of those young men, and then ask soberly how *we* would wish to be treated? Would *we* like to have gentlemen to deal with, or a mob? I don't propose to abandon our right to the river, by any means, and the last speaker knows as well as anybody that I do not. Is the mere question of a compromise so very absurd?"

"Yes, sir!" bellowed the voice at the window, from which had come the interruptions to the commodore's opening speech. "Yes, sir! and I'll tell you why!"

Thereupon, in through the window, from the balcony, came the shoulders and one leg, — his head was in already, — and finally the whole burly form of the speaker, who proved to be no other than our valiant acquaintance, Milt Buzrow, of the crow-bar, — the Buzrow whose father had knocked down a cow with his unarmed fist.

"There can't be no compromise!" He was a little careless with his negatives in times of excitement. "I don't care what the mill-owners 'll be willing to do, they can't do but one thing to suit us. As long as the dam or any part of the dam remains, it 's in our way, and it 's got to go!"

This was uttered with a gesture of the clinched fist, — which, as we have before intimated, appeared to be a very creditable copy of the cow-smiter's, — and was loudly cheered.

"Was the river made for everybody, or for only one or two, I 'd like to know?" Buzrow went on, advancing toward the middle of the floor. "If it 's only for the mill-owners, why then we 'll throw up our hand, as Web Foote says. But if the public has rights there, the public has got to stand up for its rights, and I go in for standing up for 'em with a good, stiff iron bar."

This allusion to yesterday's adventure produced a lively sensation.

"I broke the dam, and I 'll break it again!" Buzrow cried in a big voice, with a braggart laugh.

"Look out for bean-poles!" said one of the Tammosets.

"I don't care for their bean-poles. Lawyer Snow says we 've jest as much right to tear away that dam

as we would have to break a gate put across the highway. I s'pose you know that."

As the speaker appealed to the commodore, the commodore quietly replied, —

"I 've heard of his saying so; but I 've no doubt there are better lawyers than Snow, who would tell the other side exactly the contrary."

"Then, law or no law," cried Buzrow, "the dam has got to go. S'pose they do take up their flash-boards for us, or make other arrangements for letting our boats through, what a trouble it 's going to be, every time we get to the dam, to wait till some gate is opened, which very likely we should have to open ourselves; and then we all know how it is when water is low. Last summer Dushee shut his flash-boards after I had got through, going down, and kept back the water so my boat got aground and could n't be got off till I went and smashed 'em."

"That 's so! that 's so!" cried several voices at once.

"What I claim is," Buzrow said in conclusion, "we 've got a right to the whole width of the river at all times. If the mill-owners will agree to that, all right. It 's the only compromise *I* will make, as long as I own a crow-bar."

Two or three violent speeches followed on the same side. Then the secretary rose. This was Charley Kent, brother of Mollie, whom we have seen. "I don't think the commodore's position is fully understood," he said, in a modest, conciliatory way, leaning with one hand on the table. "He does n't propose to give up everything to the mill-owners, as some of the speakers assume. But the question is, shall we treat them in a gentlemanly way or in a ruffianly way? Are we a club or a mob?"

"This is the second time I've heard that word *mob!*" cried Web Foote, springing to his diminutive legs, and wildly flinging back the hair from his brow. He threw his chest forward and his head back, much in the style of a fighting cockerel.

"When such epithets come from officers of the club," — his voice rose to a shriek, — "applied to members of the club," — he sprang forward about three feet, as if he had been going to strike his spurs into somebody, — "I, for one, hurl them back with contempt!"

He illustrated the hurling with his right arm thrust straight out — that is to say, diagonally upward — at the said officers, with little fist clinched, in comical contrast with that of the cow-smiter's burly son. At the same time, his left arm, also with

little fist clinched, was thrust down diagonally behind, as if to balance his person, — which, by the way, was now fully eight feet tall, in his own estimation, if it was an inch.

"We feel the gentleman's contempt, and are withered by it," said the commodore, once more on his feet, and looking calmly over Web Foote's head at the back benches, until Web subsided into his seat. "Nevertheless, I stand to what I have said. Shall we appoint a committee to confer with the mill-owners, and reserve further action on the subject until our next meeting? That seems to me the only fair and honorable thing to do."

"And leave the dam there meanwhile? No, sir," roared Milt Buzrow.

"I want a vote of the club," the commodore insisted. "If, as a club, we are not prepared to act honorably in this and every other matter, I wish to know it, in order that I may take care of my own personal character in time."

His bearing was so manly, and his quietly-earnest words carried such weight, that he now had a large majority of the Argonauts with him, as was shown by the subsequent vote. Even Web Foote, seeing how the current of popular opinion was turning, stood and was counted in favor of a committee.

Then Milt Buzrow said, "I move that Web Foote be appointed a member of that committee."

That was not what the commodore wanted, by any means. But the motion being seconded, he put it to the vote, and it was carried.

Then the secretary moved that Commodore Lew Bartland be also appointed a member.

"Gentlemen of the club," said the commodore, hardly trying to conceal his dissatisfaction, "I see no use at all in my serving on this committee with the member already chosen."

But as his friends insisted on voting for him, he yielded, and was chosen without a dissenting voice.

In order that both towns might be represented, a Tammoset member was then selected, and the committee was full.

After some further business was transacted, the meeting broke up harmoniously; and the cause of peace and good order seemed, for the time being, to have prevailed.

CHAPTER XIV.

WHAT HAPPENED THAT NIGHT.

AT half past nine o'clock the Tinkham brothers were still waiting for the return of the Argonauts down the river.

It was a mild, starry April night. The rest of the family had retired, and the lights in the house were all extinguished, when the three older boys ensconced themselves in the willow-tree, — not without bean-poles at hand, — to keep guard over their property.

They could hear, in the darkness, the gurgle of the outgoing tide in the eddies formed by the ends of the open dam. Frogs piped in a marsh not far off. No other sound on river or lake or shore. So they waited half an hour longer, under the calm stars.

Then shouts and laughter were heard in the direction of the new club-house, and they knew that the meeting was over. After a while arose on the night air the "Canadian Boatman's Song," sung by harmonious male voices, softened by distance and solitude to an almost spiritual melody.

"That has n't a very w-w-warlike sound," said Lute.

"No," replied Mart. "I think the commodore's advice has prevailed, as I believed it would."

Truly, no night-marauders ever went to their work of destruction to the sound of such music.

The singing grew loud and strong as the boats passed from under the shelter of the high shore and approached the outlet of the lake, and came floating down the dark current of the Tammoset.

The Tinkhams stretched themselves out on the benches in the tree, so that their silhouettes might not be seen against the starry sky as the Argonauts glided beneath them. One by one the boats passed the dam without difficulty or disturbance. Then, again, the voices were mellowed to an almost spiritual sweetness far down the windings of the river. "Six went up. Only four have gone back," said Rush.

"I suppose the other two are to be kept in the new club-house, along with the Tammoset boys' boats," Mart replied. "Come to bed now! We are safe from the depredations of the Argonauts for to-night, any way."

They went softly to their rooms, taking care not to disturb their mother, and slept soundly after their anxious watch. Then, in the morning, astonishment!

The flash-boards, which had been left lying inof-

fensively on the platform, were missing; and the plank that Buzrow had started with his bar on Sunday had been wrenched off and taken away.

The damage done was not great, but it was exasperating. "It shows what we've got to expect, and what we 'll look out for in future, boys!" said Mart, sternly, as they set about rigging new flash-boards and repairing the dam.

"Don't tell me again not to strike when I 've a bean-pole over one of their worthless pates!" said Rush, with choking wrath, and Lute added, —

"What do you think now of your c-c-commodore? And their b-b-beautiful singing?"

Mart made no reply, but wielded his hammer as if he had been nailing the Buzrow fist to the dam instead of a board.

The affair was all the more trying because of the delay it involved when the tide was going out, and they wished to take advantage of the wasting water-power. At length, however, all was ready; Rush returned to his jig-saw and his pin-wheels, and Lute to his lathe and the hubs of his dolls' carriages, while Mart opened the sluice-gate.

The machinery started, almost stopped, and then started again with a jerk. "Why don't you let the w-w-water full on?" cried Lute.

"The water is on; the gate is wide open," Mart replied.

"Then what the m-m-mischief is the matter with the w-w-wheel?"

"Thunder knows!" Mart exclaimed, watching the unsteady movements with scowling brows.

Rush sprang to a door which opened upon the water-wheel, and looked it carefully over, while it continued to revolve in the same jerky manner as at first. "Shut it off! shut it off!" he shouted, giving Mart a rapid signal with his hand. "Slowly! There!" — while Mart applied the lever — "I see what 's the matter."

They could all see, after the wheel had stopped. On one side a section of five or six of the slender paddle-blades had been broken out. Only notched splinters remained, showing that the work had been done by means of blows from some hard and ponderous implement.

The three, crowding the doorway, gazed for some moments in silence, only now and then a strong, deep breath being heard above the sound of the water dripping from the wheel. Over it and the band-wheel a shed projected, open on the lower side, and leaving the paddles exposed for a distance of four or five feet above the sluice-way. Evidently

the raiders had stationed themselves below, in the river, and struck the blows which broke out the blades.

Mart drew a last long breath and moved away.

"They mean war," he said, "and war they shall have."

Lute said not a word, but winked his large eyes rapidly behind his spectacles, as they turned to the light.

"It 's a wonder we did n't hear the noise," said Rush.

"We were tired, and slept like logs," Mart replied.

"And their l-l-lovely singing had thrown us off our g-g-guard," said Lute.

"There 's one comfort, boys," Mart added, with a peculiarly grim smile. "We have fair warning now of what they mean to do."

"And we don't get caught n-n-napping again!" rejoined Lute, stammering at a frightful rate. "W-w-woe to the next m-m-man th-th-that —"

Mart took up, so to speak, the stitches his brother dropped.

"We 'll make things lively for 'em next time! Say nothing to anybody. We 'll keep our own counsel, be always prepared, and trap somebody. Now, let 's

see what boards we can scare up to replace those paddle-blades."

About the middle of the forenoon, the same elegant top-buggy reappeared which had driven into the yard the day before. But it was not the commodore's pretty sister who held the reins this time. It was the commodore himself.

He, too, had a companion, having brought over the other Dempford member of the mill-dam committee chosen by the Argonauts the night before. Disagreeable as this arrangement was to Lew Bartland, he had himself proposed it, offering Mr. Web Foote a seat in his buggy, for the good effect that might result from a morning ride and quiet talk with that bumptious individual before their conference with the mill-owners.

They had arrived at the mill, when a third young man on foot came panting up behind the buggy and joined them. This was the Tammoset member of the committee, Jesse Blump by name; a pumpkin-faced youth, short of stature, short of breath, and especially short in that essential feature called a nose. He was glowing and blowing with the exertion it had cost him to come up with his colleagues, whom he now greeted with a profusion of smiles. After a few words together, the three crossed the level shed-

roof to the upper room of the shop, where they were met by Rush Tinkham's flushed face and paper cap.

The youthful commodore, showing tall and manly beside his companions, — for Blump stood not much higher than Web, though twice as broad, — recognized the hero of the bean-pole with a nod, and asked: "Where are your brothers?"

"Down-stairs," Rush answered, coldly.

"We wish to see them," said Mr. Web Foote, pressing forward with an important strut.

"You can see them," Rush replied, still with curt civility.

"We have come to confer with them on the subject of the dam," Jesse Blump added; because, being a member of so important a committee, he felt that his position required him to say something.

"You are late for that," said Rush.

"How so?" asked the commodore, with a look of concern, made aware that some untoward circumstance had intervened to balk his good intentions.

"They will tell you," said Rush; "but you can see for yourselves. The damage is n't all repaired."

"Damage!" Lew Bartland echoed, his face clouding more and more. "What damage?"

"That done by your rowdies last night."

Upon which Web Foote fluttered up and blus-

tered: "Our rowdies? What do you mean by that?"

"Just what I say," Rush replied, looking the little fellow steadily in the eye. "Only low, miserable scamps would try to injure us as they did."

"I waive the question of injury, which is something I know nothing about," Web Foote said, with swelling dignity. "But have the kindness to explain why you call them *our* rowdies?"

"Yes, that 's the question," struck in the Tammoset member. "Why *our* rowdies?"

"Because," replied Rush, "I suppose they and you belong to the same club."

"But what reason have you to charge members of our club with acting the part of rowdies?" Web Foote demanded.

"That 's so!" said Jesse Blump. "What reason?"

Rush answered, with a contemptuous laugh, —

"Because I have seen them act so!"

"Seen them — when?" cried Web Foote.

"Yes! When?" said Jesse Blump.

"Sunday afternoon. Your commodore here saw them, too. He won't deny it."

The commodore did not deny it. He looked heartily sick of the whole wretched business. Rush went on: "They did again last night what they

started to do then. And worse. They broke the water-wheel."

"Did they touch your water-wheel?" exclaimed the commodore, with sudden heat. "I can't believe that!"

"You 'd better step down and see, if you won't take my word for it," said Rush, showing the stairs, and looking as if he would like to have them make the descent with alacrity, head foremost.

"Take us to your brothers, if you please," said the commodore. And Rush, somewhat mollified by his distressed look and disheartened tone, led the way.

CHAPTER XV.

THE CONFERENCE.

MART was in the gloomy water-shed, removing the shattered blades from the wheel, with his back toward the door that opened from the shop, when Rush came behind him and said, —

"Here are some gentlemen who have come to talk about the dam."

Mart merely glanced over his shoulder, showing his sweaty and lurid brows, and remarked, as he continued his work: "There 's been some talk about that already. A little more won't do any harm. They can turn it on."

Rush stepped back, while Web Foote and Jesse Blump pressed into the doorway, the commodore looking over their hats from behind.

"Can you spare a minute to speak with us?" Web asked, pompously.

"Nary minute," Mart said, giving dryness to his reply by using the old-fashioned vernacular.

"We have come on the part of the Argonaut Club," said the pumpkin-faced Tammoset member.

"I sha'n't hurt you, if you have," said Mart. Clip, clip, with his hammer.

"This is no fit place for a conference." Web Foote drew back with a prodigious frown.

"No place at all." And Blump also drew back.

They were both dressed in dapper style ; and the floorless shed over the sluice, the rough boards, the wet wheel, and the damp odors, not to speak of the unsociable workman in coarse clothes, giving them the coldest kind of a cold shoulder, did not form a very dainty setting for their pictures.

"I 'm sorry you don't like the place," said Mart. "I don't like it myself. But my business is here just now; and I 've made up my mind to attend strictly to my business in future, and have as little to do with boat-clubs as possible. They have hindered us about two hours this morning, and we 've no more time to lose."

He was standing on a plank, so placed that he could get at the wheel; and as he said this, he turned and looked over the hats of Foote and Blump, addressing his remarks to the commodore.

"When was this mischief done?" Lew asked.

"Last night."

"Have you any idea who did it?"

"I don't know the individuals," said Mart. "But anybody can guess in whose interest it was done."

"I hope," Bartland replied, "you will do us the justice to believe that no such outrage as this was ever sanctioned by the club."

"It was n't necessary to sanction it. It has been done, you see."

"You can never make me believe," cried Web Foote, vehemently, "that any member of our club had anything to do with it!"

"Never!" exclaimed Jesse Blump.

Mart made no reply, but received a new paddle-blade — a long board — which Lute just then passed to him over the heads of Web and Jesse. He proceeded to adjust it to the wheel.

"We are in the way here, boys," said the commodore. "They are not inclined to talk with us, and no wonder. I did hope to settle our differences amicably; but, after what has happened, I don't see how it can be done."

"Thank you for your good-will," said Mart, turning again, while one hand held the board in place. "No doubt you have done what you could. But that does n't seem to be much. You did n't prevent the dam from being attacked on Sunday, nor this

other damage from being done last night. We find we have got to depend upon ourselves; and that 's what we shall do in future."

"You are right; I don't blame you," said the commodore. "I 'll only say that if I could have had my way, things would be different from what I see they are to-day, and must be, I suppose, hereafter."

"Well," said Web Foote, backing out of the water-shed as Lew turned to go, "I regret this piece of work, though, as I said, I don't believe any Argonaut had a hand in it. But that has nothing to do with the errand that brings us here."

"Nothing whatever," said Blump, also backing out, while Mart followed them into the shop.

"I think it has a good deal to do with it," said the commodore. "We come as a committee, to make peace, and find that somebody overnight has been making war. Whether this dastardly thing was done by members of the club or not, they will have the credit of it, and not without cause."

"I don't admit the cause," Web Foote protested.

"No, nor I!" said Jesse Blump.

"And I intend as a member of this committee to do what we were appointed and sent here for," said Foote.

"Precisely," said Jesse Blump. "What we were chosen and sent here to do."

Lute and Rush now stood with Mart, confronting these two members, while Lew stepped aside.

"We have come to ask you what you propose to do with your dam," said Web Foote.

"Exactly," said Jesse Blump. "What do you propose to do with your dam?"

The drooping side of Mart's homely mouth drew down with its drollest expression, as he gave his brothers a side glance and drawled out, —

"They want to know what we propose to do with our d-a-m! What do we propose to do with it?"

"We don't propose to do anything with it," cried Rush, hotly.

"Y-yes, we do!" Lute stammered. "We propose to k-k-keep it where it is, if we c-c-can. And I g-g-guess we can."

"That seems to be the general opinion of our side," said Mart. "We need the dam for our little water-power. And after we get our wheel mended, we shall need it more than ever to make up for lost time."

If it was possible for Web Foote to stand straighter than before, he did it now, as he said, —

"We have come on the part of our club to inform

you that it obstructs the river and is in the way of our boats."

If it was possible for Jesse Blump to look more pumpkin-faced than before, he did it when he, too, blustered up and said: "That 's the point! It hinders our boats in going up and down the river."

"Do you own the r-r-river?" Lute inquired.

"No, but we own the boats," said Web Foote.

"We own the boats," echoed Jesse Blump.

"And we own the dam," said Mart. "We did n't build it; but we have bought it, and we mean to keep it. We have no wish to interfere with your boats, and you are respectfully requested not to interfere with our dam."

"We heard that you proposed to make some arrangements for letting our boats through," said Web. "We did n't believe it practicable; but our club wished to act honorably, and hear what you had to say, before taking the matter into its own hands and removing the obstructions."

"That 's just it, — before removing the obstructions," said Jesse Blump.

"Meanwhile, your honorable club comes in the night-time, and not only attempts to remove obstructions, but breaks the water-wheel!" said Mart. "Your language does n't bulge very much with com-

mon-sense, my young friends; nevertheless, we 'll waste a little more time on you."

He rested his right hand on his hip in his favorite attitude, as he continued, again addressing Commodore Lew over his colleagues' hats.

"We came here as strangers, and were ready to do anything reasonable for the sake of keeping on good terms with everybody in these two towns who would use us well. We are not brigands and outlaws; though, by their treatment of us, some of your fellows seem to have thought so. We are really as kind-hearted as the old lady who warmed the water she drowned her kittens in. We would n't willingly injure anybody."

"Only yesterday," Rush broke in, also addressing Bartland, "my brother said, if the Argonauts were all like you, he would accommodate your boats if he had to stand at the dam and carry them over on his shoulder."

"What I meant by that rather absurd speech," said Mart, "was this, that we would put ourselves to any inconvenience to oblige you. And so we will do now, to accommodate those who treat us as civilized beings should treat one another. But we see by last night's transactions that we have to deal with savages. And our answer to all such is, that

we propose to keep our dam in spite of 'em, and stand up for our rights. Is n't that about the way it hangs, boys?"

Rush and Lute assented with quiet, determined looks.

"Then all I say is, you've got a hard row to hoe!" said Web Foote.

"An awful hard row to hoe!" said Jesse Blump.

"We expect it," said Lute. "But it 's better to know we have a fight on our hands, and be p-p-prepared for it, than to be caught as we were l-l-last night."

"I did n't believe any compromise was possible, and now I know it," said Web Foote. "But I 've done my part."

"Yes; we and the club have done our part," said Jesse Blump.

"You and the club have done your part in a way that *makes* a compromise impossible," said Mart. "The commodore will admit that."

What the commodore thought was plain enough, but he said nothing.

"You will have not only the club, but both towns against you," said Web Foote, with a toss of the head, probably from the habit of throwing his hair back in debate, though he now kept his hat on.

"I can speak for Tammoset," said Jesse Blump. "Both towns will take the matter in hand."

"No doubt you will all be very brave," replied Mart. "There are five boys of us, big and little; and there may be five hundred against us. But with law and right on our side, we shall take our chances."

Web Foote was strutting toward the outer door, followed by the Tammoset member. Seeing that the interview was over, Commodore Lew stepped impulsively back toward Mart and his brothers.

"I don't know whether you care to part as friends with me," he said, with manly emotion.

"Certainly I do!" Mart replied, warmly grasping the proffered hand. "You have acted nobly, and I thank you."

"I might have helped you; but this whole business has been managed as badly as possible. You are in a hard place. I don't see how you are going to get out of it. But you may be sure," Lew added, shaking hands in turn with the other boys, "you will never have an enemy in me. I respect you too much for that."

So they parted.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE COMMITTEE REPORTS.

THE last meeting of the club had adjourned to Thursday evening, when it was expected that the mill-dam committee would be able to report.

Again on that evening the Argonauts thronged the new club-room, and the discussion of the exciting topic was renewed. The commodore was present, but, at his request, the vice-commodore occupied the chair.

Mr. Web Foote took the floor, to speak for the majority of the committee. His manner was airy and self-satisfied to a degree unusual even for him. It was evident that the turn affairs had taken had not cooled his ambition nor tripped the heels of his conceit.

"He feels he 's the upper dog in the fight, now," whispered one of the not over-friendly Tammoset boys.

"The room ought to have been built higher, on his account," remarked another. "He 'll hit a

rafter with his head some time, when he flings his hair back."

Serenely unconscious of the possibility that his exalted demeanor could excite any but admiring comments, the little Dempford youth stood erect as an exclamation-point, and launched his speech.

He first reminded the Argonauts of the position which he and a large majority of those present at the last meeting had taken with regard to the obstructions in the river.

"Nine out of ten of us, perhaps I might say thirty-nine out of forty of us," — Mr. Web Foote looked as if he had been the whole thirty-nine, — "were convinced that these obstructions should be summarily removed." (Applause.) "But out of deference to a single member, and because we wished to act MAGNANIMOUSLY in the matter — I say, MAGNANIMOUSLY —"

This word, uttered at first in small capitals, and then repeated with a swelling stress to which only large capitals can do any sort of justice, was greeted with loud applause. Commodore Lew, seated on one of the side benches, was seen to smile.

"We agreed to the appointment of a committee, and a conference with the mill-owners; though nobody, I am sure, with the exception, perhaps, of

*t*hat one member," — the speaker continued, with a peculiarly sarcastic smile, — "expected that any satisfactory arrangement with them could be made. That was n't possible, in the nature of things. What we demand is the river, the whole river, and nothing but the river, open to us," — he opened his arms wide, as if *he* had been the river, — "now, henceforth, and at all times."

Tremendous cheers. The torrent of eloquence flowed on.

"The conference was decided upon; and I was chosen one of those to perform that disagreeable duty. How very disagreeable it was to be I had no forewarning, or I should have declined the honor. Going as gentlemen to call upon these much-lauded young mill-owners, we had reason to expect gentlemanly treatment. Invested with the authority of the club, we supposed we were entitled to respect. But we received instead" — spoken with shrill emphasis and a violent gesture — "*boorish insults and insolent defiance!*"

Great sensation. Web tossed back his hair, swung on his heel, and looking about him, saw faces flaming up with excitement.

"Yes, gentlemen of the club, fellow-Argonauts! These charming strangers; these industrious makers

of dolls' carriages for two continents" (a titter); "these good boys who deserve our help and sympathy, as we were lately informed" (this was uttered with thrilling irony); "these honest, well-meaning mill-owners, — received us with *insults and dismissed us with defiance!*"

If Mr. Web Foote expected an uproar of indignation to follow this stroke of oratory, he was not disappointed. He then proceeded to describe the "conference" from his own point of view, making out the conduct of the Tinkham boys to have been as bad as possible, and kindling the wrath of the Argonauts.

"Yes, gentlemen," he said, in his final summing up of the whole matter, "after declining at first to have anything to say to us, then treating us with clownish insolence, and insulting in our persons the whole club, calling us rowdies and savages, they did finally condescend to inform us of their sovereign will and pleasure. They scoffed at the idea of a compromise, and vowed that they would keep the dam where it is, *in spite of us.* Yes, fellow-Argonauts, IN SPITE OF US!" he repeated in a voice between a hiss and a shriek. "Their very words, as my colleagues will bear witness. IN SPITE OF US!"

At this climax, Mr. Web Foote tossed his hair back from his forehead and himself back upon his seat.

Indescribable clamor ensued. A dozen members were on their feet at once, gesticulating and shouting; among them the burly Buzrow form and face and fist, and the Buzrow voice bellowing to be heard.

Some were for rushing forth at once and answering the mill-owners' defiance by "ripping out the dam." Fortunately the state of the tide was not favorable to the enterprise; and the chairman, by vigorous rapping on the table, succeeded in restoring something like order.

"Mr. Jesse Blump," he said, recognizing one of them who had been trying to speak.

Mr. Jesse Blump had sat down again in the back part of the room, but now the face of him, looking less like a pumpkin in the lamp-light, and more like a full moon, rose red and round over the troubled waters, and shed its genial glimmer on the scene.

"As one of the colleagues appealed to," he said, "I can bear witness that we — that they — treated us — with the — the very words you have — heard. They would keep the dam in spite of us. Something like that. I think the other member of the committee will agree with them — I mean with us — that these were the very expression."

Thereupon the newly-risen moon, redder if not rounder than before, set again with surprising abruptness.

"What fools we were," remarked one of the aforesaid Tammoset boys, "to put Jesse Blump on that committee!"

"Don't you see?" said the other. "It was necessary to take a member from our town; and the Dempfords chose one who could be led by the nose."

"He? He has no nose to be led by," was the contemptuous retort.

Blump's speech did not have the effect of firing the Argonauts to a still wilder fury. It served, on the contrary, as a sort of anti-climax to Webb's harangue, and prepared the way for Lew Bartland.

Lew felt that he had a tremendous current of opinion against him, but he faced it without flinching.

He could not quite keep down his rising heart as he reviewed what he called the "report of the majority," which, he declared, entirely misstated some of the facts and gave quite a false coloring to others.

"I admit, he said, "that we were, at the outset, treated with scant civility. But there was a reason

for it which appears very small in the report you have heard, while the so-called rudeness appears very large."

He then gave his own version of the interview, enlarging upon the provocation the mill-owners had received, which Web had passed over as a very trifling matter.

"They did not call *us* rowdies and savages. They called the persons who had committed the outrage rowdies and savages. AND I SAY THEY WERE RIGHT."

Lew made this avowal with an emphasis of suppressed feeling which produced a strong impression.

"If there's an Argonaut present who holds that they were wrong, I'd like to have him stand up and say so. If there's one here who dares maintain that the breaking of the water-wheel that night was an act to be applauded, let's know who he is, before going any further."

Web Foote popped up, flung back his hair, and exclaimed, —

"No Argonaut had anything to do with it, and I told them so."

A dozen voices echoed, "No! no Argonaut!" and made the room ring with renewed tumult.

"I don't say it was done by Argonauts," Lew

went on, as soon as he could be heard. "I've made inquiries, and I can't learn that any member of the club knew anything about it. But what I say is, it was an act of vandalism, which might well rouse the resentment of the mill-owners. What I say further is, that they had good reason to believe it was done by some of us, or at all events in our interest."

"No! no! no!" clamored twenty voices.

"I say they had reason to think so!" cried the young commodore, with splendid spirit. "Who are known as the active enemies of the dam? Who but the Argonauts? Of course they suspected us. Right or wrong, they laid the outrage to us, and treated your committee accordingly. I could n't blame them. They were mad, as any of us would have been in their place. But, even then, they could have been easily pacified and brought to some agreement if your committee had met them as I think they should have been met, under the circumstances."

"We did n't go down on our knees to them!" cried Web Foote, jumping up.

"We did n't go as far as that; we did n't kneel to 'em!" cried Jesse Blump, who, having sweated off the embarrassment of his first attempt at a speech,

felt now that he could make a very good one, if he only had a chance.

Web was in his seat again, and the full moon, which had also risen, had set a second time over the sea of faces. Lew went on : —

"They declared their readiness to accommodate every boat that approaches, in a friendly way, to pass the dam. I believe they will do all in their power to oblige those who treat them fairly. But as for going to any great expense to build a lock, or anything of the sort, until they are sure of satisfying us, and feel safe from midnight depredations, they were not so foolish as to waste words about that. They know too well that it would n't satisfy us ; and that they have, what they rightly termed, rowdies to deal with."

"I am glad we know what our worthy commodore thinks of us!" cried Web Foote, wilfully misconstruing the last remark, and raising another storm.

"Misunderstand me if you will!" shouted Lew, himself in a blaze of excitement by this time. "Be unjust to me as you are to the mill-owners. Oh!" he broke forth, with indignation ringing in his tones, "I am disheartened, I am ashamed, I lose faith in human nature, when I see young men like us here unable to take large and liberal and just

views of a subject in which their selfish interests are involved; unable to see that the other side has rights they ought to respect; ready to take the law into their own hands, and be judges and executioners in a cause that should be tried by humanity, forbearance, and good sense."

Another fiery speech from the little Dempford member, followed by two or three others on the same side, among them one from the son of the father whose fist had knocked down a cow; then, after a somewhat feeble and lukewarm support of the commodore by a few of his personal friends, the report of the majority was accepted by an overwhelming vote.

"Commodore Bartland," said the chairman.

Bartland was on his feet again, pale but firm, if not calm.

"I have foreseen how this thing was likely to go," he said, "and I will now ask the secretary to read a paper which has been in his hands since yesterday."

He sat down, but rose again immediately.

"First, however," he said, "I wish to make one more correction. It has been charged that the mill-owners vowed they would keep their dam in spite of us. They did n't say that. What they did say was something like this: '*We have learned, by last night's*

proceedings, that we have to do with savages, but we propose to keep the dam in spite of all such.'"

"The same thing! the same thing!" chorused several voices.

"If we are the savages who broke the water-wheel, then it is the same thing; otherwise, it is not the same thing at all. Can't we discriminate? Are we quite blind with passion?" cried Lew, with contemptuous impatience. "But I 'll tell you one thing, gentlemen of the club!"

His energetic face lighted up with a smile, as he added, lowering his voice, —

"Those young men of the mill are not of the sort it is altogether safe to trifle with. They believe, as I believe, and as you will find out, that they have the law with them. They are going to defend their property; and I advise whoever has a hand in destroying it —"

"What?" cried Buzrow, as the speaker paused.

"To wear thick gloves!" said Lew Bartland, significantly.

The paper he had called for was then read. In it he resigned his position as commodore of the club.

CHAPTER XVII.

MART BEGINS A SCRAP-BOOK.

THE retirement of Lew Bartland rendered another meeting of the club necessary, in order to fill the vacant office of commodore.

It was held early in the following week. Lew was not present, and the Web Foote faction had everything its own way. Web had some opponents among the Tammoset boys and Lew's Dempford friends; but they could not unite upon any one candidate, and, when the ballot was taken, Web was elected by a large maiority.

It was just what he expected. He was at the summit of his ambition. He was jubilant — he walked upon air.

A committee of ten members was then chosen, "to decide what measures should be taken for the removal of the obstructions in the river"; in other words, to get rid of the Tinkham brothers' mill-dam. Somehow the impression had got abroad that it would not be safe for individuals to meddle with it

without a strong backing. The time had come, therefore, when it behooved the valiant Argonauts to take action as a club.

After the meeting had adjourned, the new committee held a consultation with closed doors. Its deliberations remained a mystery; but the election of the new commodore made no little noise in both towns. The *Dempford Gazette* had a paragraph about it: —

"We understand that the special meeting of the Argonaut Club on Tuesday evening was a perfectly harmonious gathering; and that Webster Foote, Esquire, was chosen commodore — *vice* Lew Bartland, resigned — by an almost unanimous vote. This means the speedy destruction of all impediments to the free navigation of our beautiful river. Among our rising young men, there is not one more popular or more prominent just now than Commodore Foote."

We will not begrudge the new commodore the gratification with which he read this bit of local gossip. He saw it first in the *Dempford Gazette;* and it was natural that he should send at once for the *Tammoset Times* for the pleasure of seeing it there also. It was the same paper masquerading under another name across the river.

The Tinkham brothers likewise took pains to pro-

cure a copy of the *Times*, having heard that there was something in it about the mill-dam troubles. Rupe brought it to them one afternoon in the mill. They read the paragraph with different feelings from those it inspired in the swelling bosom of Commodore Foote. But they were not dismayed.

"That's the same strutting little fellow who wanted to know what we were going to do with our d-a-am!" drawled Mart.

Upon which Lute, whose ingenuity sometimes extended to the making of a pun, stuttered out, —

"I knew by his g-g-gait that he would be c-c-commodore!"

"By his *gate* that he would become a *door!* O Lute! O Lute!" cried Rush, shaking with laughter; while Mart merely drew down the droll corner of his mouth and gave Lute a reproachful glance.

"I hear there has been a good deal of this kind of l-l-literature in the papers," said Lute. "And I should n't wonder if there would be m-m-more before they get through with us."

"We 'll begin a scrap-book," said Mart, cutting out the paragraph with a chisel on his work-bench. "This may be the nucleus of a large and interesting volume."

"The confounded editors!" exclaimed Rush. "They always take the popular side of a question like this."

"Must n't b-blame 'em," said Lute. "If they should take the other side, how would their bread get b-b-buttered?"

"I would try to take the side of justice, if I went without butter and bread, too!" rejoined Rush. "What do they know about us and our business here? An item like that will prejudice hundreds of people!"

"And sell perhaps a hundred extra p-p-papers," said Lute. "We must n't let mother see *that!*"

"No," said Mart, carefully folding the nucleus of his future volume and placing it in his pocket-book. "We 'll let her be happy and sleep nights as long as she can. There 's worry enough in store for her, I 'm afraid."

"When she *does* find out, as I suppose she will some time," Rush replied, "we want to be able to say, 'Oh, yes! Trouble about the dam? of course! There has been all the time, but we have n't minded it, and the dam is still there!'"

"If it *is* still there, as I t-t-trust it will be," said Lute. "What makes the Argue-nots" (the boys had taken up Mr. Rumney's word) "so quiet just

now, I wonder? Planning their c-c-campaign, I suppose."

Nothing which the boys could think of had been neglected in preparing for all possible contingencies, only Mart would not yield to the clamorous request of the younger boys that they might go to town and borrow their Cousin Tom's revolver. Cousin Tom was sick, and they knew he would be glad to lend it in a good cause.

"No, boys," Mart said, "I don't want any weapons deadlier than what we've got. Not at present. I should be sorry to shoot anybody. It would n't look well, and I don't believe I should be happy about it afterward."

"Not in defence of your property?" cried Rupert.

"Not even in defence of our property. This carrying revolvers is a foolish business, as a general thing."

"It's c-c-cowardly!" said Lute.

"But Cousin Tom carries one."

"He carried one in Texas, where he did n't like to go unarmed among armed and violent men. That 's another thing."

"Don't we expect to have violent men to deal with?" said Rush, who saw the wisdom of Mart's decision, and yet had a boyish inclination for revolvers.

"Yes, rather!" drawled Mart. "And there 's no

He lay down in his clothes by an open window overlooking the dam: P. 147.

"Tell 'em Commodore Foote is here with his yachtsmen."

P. 151.

knowing what they may drive us to do. But I don't want to meet 'em with a pistol in my fist, if I can help it. A time might come, you know, when I could n't resist the temptation to use it."

Meanwhile, the brothers kept careful watch over their property by day, and at bedtime every night one of the older ones returned quietly to the mill. There a bed of shavings was prepared, and there he lay down in his clothes, by an open window overlooking the dam.

Attached to a nail within reach of his hand was the end of a piece of twine, which was a ball by day, but which, every evening, was carried on its unwinding way out of the mill, thrown up the bank, unrolled along the ground, and finally tossed, what was left of it, into a window of the house. Behind the window, which was left open, another of the boys slept, with that end of the string tied to his wrist; while the other end, as said before, remained fastened to the nail in the mill.

Lute was generally the one to betake himself to the pile of shavings, because he was a light sleeper. The first sound of marauders trying their operations would have been sure to wake him. Then a jerk of the string would have been enough to bring the other boys at once to his assistance.

Every morning the twine, cast loose from the casement, was drawn along the ground and over the bank by a pair of hands at the mill, wound in a ball and kept ready for use the next night. All which was most carefully done in order not to excite the suspicions of the mother.

Still, no marauders came. Everything was ominously quiet; it was like a calm preceding a storm.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE NEW COMMODORE'S NEW YACHT.

IT was still early in the season for many boats to be passing the dam. If one appeared when the flash-boards were in, the brothers made haste to remove them and let it through, often receiving scanty thanks for their pains.

"No matter for their thanks," said Mart as Rush one day complained of this lack of civility. "That 's an article they can be as stingy of as they please. We 'll treat 'em well a good deal longer than they treat us well."

Then one afternoon an incident occurred.

Web Foote had a very good sail-boat the year before, but it had been beaten in one or two races, late in the season, and as he could not bear to be beaten in anything, he had, during the winter, been building a new yacht, which was expected to outstrip everything of its size that sailed.

It was now finished. Originally called the "Nymph," immediately on his accession to office

he had learned to have the name changed to the "Commodore," much to the distress of the painter, who found difficulty in lettering so broad a name upon so narrow a stern. The boat was sturdily built here and there, however. With assistance in hauling the heavy barge.

The night was watched, and the new letters on the stern were barely dry when the commodore started one afternoon to take his namesake up the river.

He would have liked the glory of sailing from Delaplaine with his commodore's pennant flying, advertising to all the world the new dignity of the owner. But though wind and tide were favorable, there were bridges in the way of the mast, which had to be laid horizontally from stern to stem, with its long, taper end projecting forward over the water.

Will had engaged a friend to make the trip with him, but the friend had not come; and after waiting an hour the impatient commodore set out, accompanied only by a scrub boy in a small boat.

The small boat had the yacht in tow, and the scrub boy felt his swelling consequence as the wake of the steamboats rocked the larger craft, gave useless orders and shouted unnecessarily.

They made a prosperous start. But, in addition to the hour's delay in waiting for his friend, Web found that the tide was an hour earlier than he had supposed. That made two hours. The result was that, in order to get the yacht up into the lake that afternoon, the high-souled commodore had to get down into the skiff and pull an oar with the boy.

That vexed Web Foote. He was mad at his friend who had failed him, mad at the boy who did not row faster, mad at the bridges which were in the way of his sail, and mad at the tide, which turned before they reached the dam.

Then, you may be sure, he was thrice mad at the dam itself, when they came to it, and found the flash-boards in.

"I wish Milt Buzrow was here with his crow-bar!" he said, mopping the sweat of toil and rage from his face.

In the absence of Buzrow and crow-bar, he was constrained to stop at the mill and send the boy in with an impertinent message to the owners, —

"Tell 'em Commodore Foote is here with his yacht, and if they don't pull out their flash-boards he 'll smash 'em."

Which the boy, overawed, perhaps, by the sight of the big brothers, wisely modified thus,—

"Commodore Foote would like to have you take up your flash-boards and let his yacht through."

"Commodore Foote shall be accommodated," said Mart.

The brothers had watched the commodore's approach; and while they laughed to see him fume at the oar, and glance wildly over his shoulder at the dam, they had waited with some concern to see what he would do. Lute had even overheard the original order to the boy.

"Did you tell 'em what I told you to?" Web demanded, when the boy went out to him.

"Ay, ay, sir!" said the boy, who had been informed by him, on starting from Dempford, that that form of expression was nautical, and would be becoming in him; though it might be varied sometimes, by "Ay, ay, commodore!"

"And what did they say?"

"They said Commodore Foote should be accommodated."

"Well for them! Up with your flash-boards here!" Web called out haughtily to Mart, who followed the boy from the mill. "I can't be kept waiting all day!"

Mart concealed his irritation, if he felt any, by an amused drawing down of his mouth and an exaggeration of his usual drawl.

"Don't be impatient, my little man! I'll let you through in a minute."

He was stooping with great deliberation to reach the ropes that fastened the boards to the post, when the commodore retorted, sharply, —

"Don't *little man* me! I'd have you know that you are talking to Commodore Foote, of the Argonauts!"

"Commodore Foote, or Commodore Little-toe, it does n't make much difference to me," said Mart, holding the ropes, but leaving the boards in their place. "You won't get through any sooner for being so excessively polite."

"I'll make a hole in your dam!" And, springing on board the yacht, the commodore seized and brandished a boat-hook.

"You can do that; and other people can make a hole in your yacht, and in you, too, if necessary," said Mart. "You have n't a monopoly of making holes, by any means. I'm going to let you pass."

So saying he pulled up the flash-boards. The retarded water swept through in an impetuous current. The stout boy in the small boat pulled in vain against it, with the yacht pulling more powerfully in the other direction. Web missed a stroke

at the platform with his boat-hook; and the yacht, swinging about, was drifting down stream, towing the tow-boat stern foremost, when Mart caught hold of the projecting end of the mast and stopped it.

"See what a bother your dam is!" snarled Web.

"Yes," drawled Mart, starting the yacht forward again. "It's a necessary evil. Why don't you sail up in this wind?"

"Don't you see the bridges?" retorted the furious commodore.

"Oh! the bridges are a bother, too!" said Mart. "Why don't you have 'em taken away? Seems to me I would! I don't see what right they have to stop one of your pretty little pleasure-boats."

"You talk like a fool!" said Web.

"No matter how I talk, as long as I am helping you in a good sensible way," Mart replied, with strong arms shoving the yacht ahead. "Don't you remember I said I would do all I could to oblige *gentlemen?* It's a pleasure to help one who is so very civil."

"Lucky for you the opening ain't too narrow for my breadth of beam!" said the little commodore,—speaking of the yacht, of course, and not of his own personal dimensions, as Mart by his smile seemed inclined to construe him. "There'll be bigger

boats than mine going up here soon. Do you know what 'll happen then?"

"I suppose the bridges, if any are left, will all be draw-bridges, and dams will have locks," Mart answered.

"A lock is just what we p-proposed to build, in the first place," said Lute, who, with Rush, had come out to stand by his brother and see the yacht through. "It would help you m-m-more than the dam hinders. Don't you see?"

Skiff and yacht were now well through the dam, but the current was strong against them, until Lute illustrated his meaning by putting in the flash-boards. This at once set the water back, and made the further progress of the boats up to the outlet comparatively easy. Nevertheless, Web's last words were flung back spitefully at the mill-owners, —

"We are not going to be bothered by any lock, or any dam, either! That 's what 'll happen!"

"The C-c-commodore!" said Lute, reading the name on the stern. "He shows about as much good t-t-temper as he does good t-t-taste."

"I don't see how you could keep from catching him up by the nape of the neck, and giving him a good ducking!" Rush said, excitedly, to Mart. "I would if I had been you."

Mart smiled grimly.

"No, you would n't, Rocket! It is n't quite time for that. Come, boys!"

"What a club it must be that is bossed by such a p-p-puppy!" said Lute, as they went back into the mill.

CHAPTER XIX.

TWO SIDES TO A STORY.

MRS. TINKHAM was a woman of keen observation; and Letty and the boys were in constant fear lest something should happen, or some unlucky word be let fall, that might defeat all their plans for preserving her peace of mind, — so sure were they that her feeble health and maternal anxiety would not let her sleep, as they did, when she should know all.

It was indeed a wonder that she could be kept in ignorance so long. But the younger ones guarded well their tongues, and, so far, suspicious circumstances and unlucky allusions to the dangerous subject in her presence had been lightly explained away.

"How long can we keep it up?" they asked themselves, watching her pale, serene face with tender concern, and dreading the time when the threatened storm should burst.

The day after Commodore Foote took his yacht

up the river was Saturday, on which day Letty ran out to the mill, in a flutter of excitement, to carry her brothers a bit of joyful news.

"Who do you think has come to the house? My old schoolmate, Tilly Loring! I thought you would want to know in time to brush up a little for dinner."

The necessity of brushing up a little to meet a pretty girl of sixteen made her visit rather an embarrassing pleasure to the busy boys. But they gave an extra five minutes to their toilet that day, and were amply repaid in smiles by the charming Matilda.

"I'm so glad you've come, on m-m-mother's account!" was Lute's cordial greeting. "She has hardly seen a friendly face since we c-c-came here."

"Don't the neighbors call on you? How strange!" said the visitor. "I thought that it was the custom in the country to call on newcomers."

"So did I," replied the widow. "And to tell the truth, I rather dreaded making acquaintances. I wanted to be alone with my children, and enjoy our new happiness. We *have* been let alone to our heart's content."

"They don't seem to be a very social set just

around here," said Letty, who thought she knew well enough why people avoided the new family that had come to the mill. "But some have called to see the boys on business."

That was one of the convenient phrases those youthful conspirators used to keep the mother in ignorance of what was going on.

"It 's all business," she said. "And I am glad; for that makes them happy."

"It makes us almost too happy!" said Mart. "We don't care to have quite so much on our hands as we have had lately. Some things are quite too pressing."

"Even the girls who call have some business errand," said the widow. "Two drove into the yard one day, and I thought surely we were going to have visitors. But no! they had only brought some message to the shop."

They were now seated at table; and Matilda, — or Tilly, as everybody called her, — placed between Letty and Rush, was plied with questions regarding their friends in town.

She chatted merrily, telling all the news she could think of; but sobered suddenly when some one asked about Cousin Tom.

"Tom Darrill? oh! he is dreadfully sick, they say.

It's consumption, after all, that he brought home with him from Texas; and they say he can't live."

"Oh, boys!" said the widow, "some of you must try to see him soon. He thinks so much of you!"

Then up spoke Rupert. "I've been wanting to go in and borrow his revolver, but the boys won't let me."

This was one of those indiscreet allusions to the great trouble which the younger ones would now and then let fall, in spite of themselves, and which had to be explained away.

"What do you want with his revolver?" the widow asked, surprised; while Rupert was overcome with sudden confusion.

"Boys have a m-m-mania for shooting," said Lute. "I've hardly outgrown it myself. But we've all got something to do, now, besides p-p-popping at a mark."

"I should hope so!" exclaimed the widow. "I've the greatest dread of pistols, and everything of the kind."

"I wish Tom would give me his revolver," said Rodman.

"The idea of your *wanting* a revolver, after what mother has said!" rejoined Letty; and, to change the conversation, she turned again to Tilly, and

begged her to "tell everything she knew about everybody else."

"Last Saturday," said Tilly, "I went to visit Sarah Ball. She lives in Dempford now, you know. How far is Dempford from here?"

"About a stone's throw from our b-b-bank," said Lute.

"What do you mean?" cried Tilly. "I supposed I was miles and miles away, or I should have come over to see you when we went out to ride."

"The town lies just across the river," said Rush. "But it 's a mile or more to the village."

"So near? How I wish I had known! The Balls live in the village, and keep a horse and a boat. Boating will be all the rage there this season. They 've got up a club; all the big boys are joining it, and all the little boys want to join it, too. They 've been having a great excitement lately about choosing a commodore."

There was a pause, in which the widow, if she had not been intent on dishing out the pudding, must have noticed the startled and conscious glances the younger boys gave the older ones, and Letty's air of constraint. Lute stammered out, —

"A commodore is an article no well-regulated club is c-complete without. I hope they g-got one."

"They had one, — a splendid fellow" said Tilly. "But he resigned, and a new one was to be elected. Everybody was talking about it. It seems there has been a great fuss over a dam which somebody has put across the river."

At this, even the older boys were filled with consternation. But the mother went on serenely dishing out the pudding.

"I've *heard* they were having some trouble with a dam," observed Mart. "Is n't it settled yet?"

"Oh, dear, no! and it is n't likely to be soon," Tilly rattled on, while Letty tried to silence her with a nudge. "The young men are all up in arms about it; and, of course, the girls and everybody else take their side. Somebody has put a dam right across the river to stop their boats. Of course they won't stand it; and I would n't, either, if I were in their place."

"Have some p-p-pudding?" said Lute, taking a plate from his mother and passing it to the visitor.

"It 's the meanest thing you ever heard of!" said Tilly, her warmth of manner showing how ardently she had espoused the cause of her Dempford friends. "Thank you," taking the plate. "Think of one man, or two or three (for I believe there are several owners of the factory, — a large factory some-

where on the river), pretending they have a right to take all the water for their business, and not leave any for the boats!"

Notwithstanding the anxiety they felt on their mother's account, the boys could n't but be amused at this version of the story.

"That does seem preposterous," said Mart. "I should think they might be contented with a fair share of the water, and leave some for other folks."

"Yes, indeed!" replied Tilly. "That 's what everybody says. They 're going to tear it away!"

"Tear what away?" said Lute. "The w-w-water?"

"No, the dam. It 's decided now. The commodore who resigned was Lew Bartland. Everybody likes him; and his sister, Syl Bartland, is a lovely girl, — an intimate friend of my friends." The boys did not dare look at each other. Mrs. Tinkham dished out the last of the pudding, while Tilly continued: "But Lew was too soft-hearted; he wanted to put off doing anything about the dam. So he got the whole club against him. They were going to put in his place a conceited fellow nobody seems to like half so well. But he 's awfully smart, they say; and he 's dead-set against the mill-owners."

"In that case," said Rush, "I should think the mill-owners would give up and clear out."

"So should I!" Tilly exclaimed. "But they're as obstinate as they are mean."

"They must be very mean!" said Mart. "Think of their wanting to take all the water and stop all the boats! Where can this factory be, boys?"

"I don't know," said Rush; "and I have n't heard of any such men."

"I hope there won't be any trouble with *our* dam," said Mrs. Tinkham, placidly stirring her tea. 'But I confess it has seemed to me as if something untoward must happen, we have been so very happy here."

"Why! have *you* got a dam?" cried Tilly.

"Yes, a little one, — a sort of plaything for boys," said Mart. "But we don't take all the water and stop all the boats, do we, Lute? Not quite! You must go out and see it after dinner."

"And the seats in the willow-tree! I wrote you about them," said Letty. "It 's a lovely spot."

She tried to change the conversation. But Tilly persisted in returning to the dangerous topic.

"The Argonauts belong to the best families in Dempford. That's what the club boys call themselves — Argonauts — though I hardly know why."

"In picking up so many interesting particulars about them," said Mart, "I wonder you did n't learn the origin of the name. Who were the old Argonauts, Rocket? You were reading up about them the other day."

"They were a boating-club named after their commodore's yacht, 'Argo'; their commodore was a fellow named Jason," was Rush's familiar version of the classic myth. "The 'Argo' was called a ship; but it was n't half so large as some yachts built now-days; and Jason could n't have held a candle to your new Dempford commodore. They pretended to sail in search of a golden fleece; which means, I suppose, that they fleeced everybody they came across."

"You 're making fun of me!" And Tilly turned her bright, questioning eyes on Master Rush.

"I beg your pardon, Miss Loring! It happened some time before any of the present Argonauts were born; thousands of years ago, in fact; that is, if it ever happened at all. But it 's as true, I 've no doubt whatever, as the most important part of the story you 've brought fresh from Dempford."

"What do you know about the Dempford Argonauts?" said Tilly, with puzzled surprise.

"A good deal; I should think I ought to! I 've

met some of them. And we can see their new club-house from our garden."

This was said as they were rising from the table.

"Can you? Show it to me!" exclaimed Tilly.

"I shall be delighted to," replied Rush; and they went out together. "You see the top of that square building over the hill yonder? That 's it, on the shore of the lake that makes in there."

"Is that indeed the Argonaut Club's new house?" said Tilly, greatly interested, and shading her eyes with her hand to get a better view.

"Yes," said Rush. "And here is something else you have heard of." He led her to the edge of the bank. "This is the willow-tree; and down there, you see the water pouring over something like a low board fence?"

"Oh, yes! is n't it pretty?"

"Do you think so? Well, don't whisper it to mother, and I 'll tell you a secret. That 's the dreadful thing that stops the boats!"

"You 're joking!" cried Tilly.

"Not a bit. It 's too serious a subject. This little old mill is the great factory you have heard of; and that is the identical dam your Argonauts, and half the people in two towns, are crazy over."

"No, no!" Tilly exclaimed, stopping her ears with her hands.

"And we boys," Rush went on, laughing, but rather bitterly, "are the mean, obstinate, horrible men, who take all the water for their business, and don't leave any —"

"I won't hear it! It is n't so! It can't be!"

He had pulled one hand away, and was trying to hold it; but she struggled to free her wrist, and again clapping both palms to her ears to shut out the cruel, astounding, incredible words, she ran across the plank and threw herself upon a seat in the great willow.

CHAPTER XX.

THE MAN IN BLUE AND THE MAN IN GRAY.

NO doubt Tilly Loring hoped Rush would follow her into the tree, and, by some soothing explanation, atone for the shock he had given her. That is what almost any other girl in her place would have wished and would have had a right to expect, if what he had said was only an ill-timed jest.

But he merely called after her, "Letty will tell you all about it!" and walked into the mill, looking terribly offended, Tilly thought.

"What have I done?" she said to herself. "They will never forgive me! I know now why Letty nudged me at the table, — she wanted to stop my tongue. I never was in such a scrape in all my life! To think how I talked to them, — I, their guest!"

She heard footsteps coming along the bank, and, looking up, saw Letty bringing hats and wraps.

"O Letty!" she implored, "say it is n't so!"

"Why, Tilly!" began Letty, guessing what Rush had been telling her.

"This *isn't* the dam the Dempford people are excited over, is it? Say it is a mistake!"

"I wish I could," said Letty. "For you've no idea how we all feel about it. All but mother. She doesn't know of it yet."

"Oh! oh! oh!" said Tilly. "How I did talk to your brothers! How they must all hate me!"

"No, indeed!" Letty threw a hat over her friend's agitated curls. "Of course, you did n't understand."

"Understand? Why, I know no more of the rights of the case than the queen of China, — if there *is* a queen of China! Your brothers could n't have built the factory; they have n't been here long enough. It looks as old as they are!"

"It is, almost. So is the dam. It has been where it is for years. And nobody ever thought of making a fuss about it till lately. It has a right to be there; and it would ruin the boys — it would ruin us all — it would be the cause of mother's losing every dollar of the money which she has put in the place — if the dam should be taken away."

"Why, Letty!" Tilly exclaimed, indignantly. "The Dempford folks know nothing of this."

"Certainly they don't! Or they don't want to know. The prejudice against the dam, and against the boys on account of it, is just frightful!"

"But is there no way of letting the boats through?"

"To be sure there is. The new commodore's new yacht went through yesterday. There are two boards, next to the platform by the mill; can you see? They pull up, and make an opening wide enough for the widest boats. And Lute has offered to build a regular lock, though there would be a great deal of work in it."

"I should think that ought to satisfy them."

"So we think," said Letty, "But, no! they must have the whole width of the river, no matter who suffers from the loss of the water-power."

"I had no idea they could be so unreasonable as that!"

"Why, they act like fiends! A few nights ago some of them came — when everybody in the house was asleep, of course — and, not satisfied with injuring the dam all they could, broke the water-wheel of the mill, and did a great deal of mischief."

"How mean! how cowardly!" exclaimed the sympathetic Tilly. "How little we know of a story when we have heard only one side!"

"You thought the mill-owners were monsters," laughed Letty. "As obstinate as they were mean; was that the phrase?"

"Don't speak of it!" Tilly threw her hands up to her face. "I never was so ashamed of anything! I can never look them in the face again."

"Don't feel so about it; they will take it as a good joke, that 's all. O Tilly! I believe there never were such brothers as these of mine. They are so good to me and mother! and I know, I know they would never do wrong, even to an enemy."

Tears sprang to Letty's eyes, while Tilly exclaimed fervently, —

"I am sure they would n't!"

"But see how they are hated, — just because they have rights and interests that are in the way of those selfish Argonauts!"

While they were talking, a man in a blue coat and a cap, with a metallic badge on his breast, came strolling up the Dempford side of the river. He crossed the bridge above, and walking up the road met a man in a gray coat and a hat, coming from the direction of Tammoset village. The man in gray, it should be said, also had a metallic badge on his breast.

Now when the Dempford man in blue met the Tammoset man in gray, they exchanged smiles and looked at their watches, much as if they had come to that particular spot by appointment; then turned together into the by-road leading to the mill.

"There comes the man we saw on the other side of the river," said Letty. "Another man with him. Business with the boys, I suppose. Oh! I hope it is n't that same old trouble!"

Seeing the girls in the tree, the two strangers turned their steps that way; and the Dempford man in blue, lifting his cap respectfully, inquired, —

"Is Mrs. Tinkham here?"

To which the Tammoset man in gray added, also touching his hat with clumsy politeness, —

"Mrs. Letitia Tinkham, — is she at home?"

"That 's my mother. She is in the house. Do you wish to see her?"

Letty, somewhat wonder-struck, had started up from her seat in the willow, and stood at the end of the plank.

"I have a document for her," said the Dempford man in blue.

"A document for her," repeated the Tammoset man in gray.

Each at the same time drew from his breast-pocket an official-looking envelope of large size.

"Please hand it to her," said the Dempford man.

"If you will be so kind," said the Tammoset man in gray.

Each at the same moment extended his document

toward the astonished Letty with one hand, and touched hat or cap with the other.

She advanced along the plank to the turf, and received the two envelopes, one in each hand.

"If you will be so good as to give it to her at once; very important," said the Dempford man in blue.

"Quite important; thank you," said the Tammoset man in gray.

They then retired along the walk, and parted at the end of the by-road, after a brief parley; the cap and the blue coat returning down the Dempford side of the river, while the gray coat and the hat took the road to Tammoset.

"What does it mean? What shall I do with them?" said Letty, in a tremor of doubt over the suspicious-looking envelopes. "Oh, here is Mart!"

"I don't exactly fancy such things just now," said Mart, with a puzzled and scowling expression. "I wonder what sort of dynamite, or other explosive material, those mysterious packages contain."

"Could n't you open one?" Letty asked.

"No, my dear." Mart shook his head. "I never could break a seal addressed to mother. There's but one thing to do, happen what will. They must be put into her own hands. Lute!" he called, "come into the house with me."

Still looking at the envelopes, he walked slowly toward the door, quickly followed by Lute, who was followed by Rush, who was followed in turn by the two smaller boys.

Lute and Rush, on coming up, also examined the envelopes. They were then returned to Letty.

"They were handed to you, and I 'll let you deliver 'em," said Mart. "Go on alone. We 'll be at hand if there 's need of us. Keep back, you young Tinkhams!"

Tilly, ashamed to face the brothers, remained in the tree.

The widow, seated, with her crutch leaning against the window-pane at her side, had just taken up her sewing, when Letty came into the sitting-room.

"You 're a person of great importance all at once, mother!" she said, with a laughing air. "See what two men have just brought you."

"Brought me?" said Mrs. Tinkham, taking the missives. "This is strange."

She saw the words, "Town of Tammoset," printed on one of the envelopes, along with the town's coat-of-arms, — a flag-staff with crossed swords, — and added, with a smile,—

"Oh! something about taxes, I suppose."

"'See what two men have just brought you!'"—Page 174.

But before breaking the seal, she looked at the other envelope. That also bore a coat of arms, — an Indian in his canoe on a river, — with the words, "Town of Dempford."

"But I don't owe any taxes in the town of Dempford, do I? Of course not."

With hands beginning to tremble she tore the wrapper, and took out a large sheet of letter-paper. The date was filled in after the printed form, "Office of the Town Clerk, Town of Dempford"; then followed the written message: —

"MRS. LETITIA TINKHAM.

"*Madam*, — This is to notify you that the mill-dam appertaining to your property in Tammoset, which said dam abuts upon the shore of this town of Dempford, and obstructs the passage of the river, has been declared a nuisance by the authorities of this said town, and you are hereby required to remove said dam within six days from this date."

Signed by the town clerk "by order of the selectmen."

Instead of trembling more, the widow's hands seemed to grow firmer as she opened the second envelope, and with sparkling eyes and compressed lips read the Tammoset document: —

"*Dear Madam*,— Complaint being made that your mill-dam on Tammoset River, in this town, prevents the free passage of

yachts and row-boats up and down said river, which is a natural public way, open to all, it is therefore ordered that the obstruction be at once demolished and removed."

Signed by the town clerk of the town of Tammoset, "by order of the selectmen."

"Where are the boys?" said the widow, in a quick, suppressed voice, looking up from the papers.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE CRISIS.

DREADING the effect of the papers upon their mother, the brothers came thronging into the room, and formed an anxious group around the widow's chair.

"Well! here 's something pleasant!" she said, handing the papers to the two oldest. "They 've been trying to scare you boys, and now they think they can frighten your poor old crippled mother!"

"What is it all about?" cried Rush. "What do you mean by their trying to scare us boys?"

"Why, Rocket!" she said, with a bright smile, "do you imagine I am so stupid as not to have known anything of your troubles all this time? Oh, you dear, deceitful, naughty, precious children!"

And the bright eyes flashed through tears.

"O mother!" cried Letty, "have you known?"

"Yes, child; from the very first. I can hardly tell how I found out. It was in the air, as they say. Then I overheard Rupert whispering to Rod-

man about something I was n't to know, for fear it would make me unhappy. But you see I have n't been so very unhappy, after all."

The tears were dashed resolutely away, and the smile was there still.

"You have kept up, and have let us believe we were hiding it all from you, because you thought that would make *us* happier! O mother!"

And Letty fell sobbing upon her neck.

"There! there! This is no time for crying!" said the widow, crying with her the while, and caressing her with fervent affection. "There! Why, I 'm as much a baby as you are! You 'll spoil my clean collar!"

"You 're the most wonderful woman in the world!" Rush exclaimed, in a gust of feeling that filled his voice and his eyes. "And the best."

"Did you think the mother of such children would show herself a coward?" cried the widow. "But I let you amuse yourselves with your devices to keep me ignorant, and all the while I was watching you, deceiving you, loving you! What do you say, boys, to those formidable town documents?"

Unmanly as it may seem, those big sons of hers had half forgotten the launched thunderbolts of the local authorities which they held in their hands, and

were winking their moist eyes over her surprising revelation.

"You knew Tilly Loring was talking about our dam?" said Rupert.

"Certainly I did! And the young men who came that day to the mill, and the two girls who came the day before, — it was all about the dam, was n't it? And don't you sleep in the mill, one of you, every night? I was sure of it!"

"You 're a w-w-witch, mother!" said Lute, wiping his misty spectacles.

"I should n't be the mother of the Tinkham boys if I was a fool! Come in, come in, Tilly!" called the widow, seeing the visitor's face pass the open door. "There are to be no more secrets. You and I have known only a part of the truth; now we are to know all."

"I 've told her," said Letty.

"Then I am the only one kept in the dark! Well! I forgive you, because I know you only meant to spare me. What are you afraid of, Tilly? My boys are not the hard-hearted wretches they are thought to be over in Dempford."

"I never was so ashamed of anything in all my life!" said the remorseful Tilly, coming reluctantly into the room.

"You need n't be; it 's a part of the fun," laughed Rush.

Hardly reassured by the cordial pleasantry with which she was received, Tilly sat down quietly in a corner, and heard a history of the troubles, as the boys told it to their mother.

Dushee's duplicity, Buzrow and his crow-bar, the work of the night marauders, the interview with the Argonauts' committee, and, lastly, the missives of the town officers, — everything was discussed; and poor Tilly, in listening, burned anew with anger and shame at what she had heard in Dempford, and with sympathy for this noble mother and these brave boys.

"I want to go right back to Dempford," she spoke up earnestly, "and tell my friends there what I now know."

"It would n't be of any use," said Rush. "You could n't do more than Lew Bartland could. Both towns have gone mad, I believe! Look at these papers."

"It seems to be a pretty good day for t-t-town clerks and selectmen," said Lute. "Brave in 'em, is n't it, to join in making w-w-war on a woman!"

"I suppose they addressed mother, because the property is in her name," said Rush. "But look at the meanness of it! Do we live in a free country?

or under a tyranny, in an age of persecution? Who is going to obey their royal edicts, anyhow?"

"Mother, of course!" said Rupert. "She's going out there on her crutches, with shovel and tongs, to tear the dam away, because some old fools say she must. I fancy!"

"Or she can tell you and me to do it, Rupe," said Rodman. "And we will, — when we get ready."

"Snap your fingers at the Dempford and Tammoset selectmen. I would!" Rupe rejoined.

"Snapping our fingers is all very fine," said the widow, once more reaching out her hand for the papers. "But let's see first what ground we have to stand on while we snap. This action of the two towns makes the matter look serious. What right have they to order the dam away?"

"About as much, I imagine," said Mart, handing the papers, which he had been studying in silence, "as they would have to order us to take our house away because it cuts off somebody's view. That is, if our dam has a right to be where it is. That's the main question."

"If the Argonauts have no right to meddle with it, then all the towns in the c-c-county have no right," said Lute. "They are just trying to b-b-bluff us; that's all."

"You have n't been much frightened yet, boys; and I glory in your spirit. But I 'm afraid there 's no shirking the fact that we've got into a terrible situation here by buying out Dushee. We have everything at stake; and in maintaining our rights, we must know just what our rights are. One of you must go to town at once and see your uncle's lawyer, who looked up the title for you."

All concurred in the wisdom of this step. The mother thought Martin should attend to a matter of so much importance. But he said, —

"It stands us in hand to keep as strong a force as possible here at the dam, about these times. Rocket is quick with a bean-pole; but I suppose I could do more effective work in case of an attack. In matters of business, though, he 's as level-headed as any of us; and I say let him slip into town and talk with the lawyer."

"You're right," said the mother; "Rocket shall go."

Rush shrank from so great a responsibility.

"Just think," he said, "what a fix I have got you all in by hunting up this place and making you buy it! Don't trust me again."

"Tut! tut!" cried the widow. "Nobody blames you for that, and you sha'n't blame yourself. See what train you can get, and be off."

In half an hour he was on his way to town. Mrs. Tinkham was left alone with Letty and their guest, and the older boys had returned to the mill.

In the interval of slack water, that afternoon, they showed their determination to keep the dam, and their defiance of the authorities of both towns, by an act which astonished some Argonauts who witnessed it, on going up the river.

Without waiting for Rocket's return with the lawyer's latest counsel, they rebuilt the platform at the end of the dam, and put in the required fishway.

"We 'll let 'em know we mean b-b-business," said Lute.

CHAPTER XXII.

WHAT THE LAWYER SAID.

IT was late that evening when Rush returned home and entered his mother's room with an unusually serious air. He found Mart talking with her, and Lute followed him in.

"What makes you so sober, Rocket," Lute asked. "No bad news from the l-l-lawyer, I hope?"

Rush explained. He had found Uncle Dave in his shop, and they had gone together to the lawyer's office.

"Then I went home to supper with uncle; and I have just spent an hour in Cousin Tom's sick-room. I can't help feeling bad, for I don't expect ever to see him alive again."

Then he had to tell all about their cousin before the business was again mentioned which made them all so anxious.

"As to that," Rush then said, brightening, "it is all right! I had a long talk with Mr. Keep in

uncle's presence, and I have written down the most important things he said."

Mrs. Tinkham nodded approvingly, as he drew from his pocket a paper, which he unfolded.

"He says, since we own one bank of the river, and have secured by purchase a privilege on the opposite bank, we have a right to construct and maintain a dam which does not change the course of the stream, nor injure anybody by setting back the water. Of course, I told him, nobody claimed that we do that."

"Rush continued, bending toward the light on his mother's table, and looking over his memorandum, —

"He says, if we have n't that right, then nobody has a private right to dam any mill-stream in the country. A dam, wherever placed, is liable to be in the way of somebody; but if the fisherman or boatman who finds it an obstacle has a right to destroy it, where is there an unchartered dam that would be safe? The fact that, instead of two or three persons, two or three hundred wish it away, or even all the inhabitants of two towns, — that, he says, makes no difference. If we have a right to our mill-power against the wishes of one individual, we have a right to it against the world. Only legislative enactments can touch it."

Lute clapped his hands gleefully.

"Let the Argonauts put that in their pipe and smoke it," drawled Mart. "Go ahead, Rocket."

"There is only one question, — is this a navigable stream? For, of course, no person has any right to obstruct navigation."

"He told us once it could n't come under the legal definition of a navigable stream," said Mart. "That 's what I 've relied on."

"You can rely on it still," replied Rush. "To make sure, I had him show me something on the subject he quoted from Chief Justice Shaw; and I copied it."

"Rocket, you 're the joy of my heart!" cried his mother, delighted.

"In the case of Rowe *versus* Granite Bridge Company, Chief Justice Shaw says: 'It is not every small creek in which a fishing-skiff or gunning-canoe can be made to float at high water which is deemed navigable. But it must be navigable,'" Rush went on, reading with emphasis, "'*to some purpose useful to trade or agriculture.*'"

"P-p-precisely!" stammered Lute.

"The business of these pleasure-boats that find our dam a nuisance," Mart remarked, in his dryest manner, "is trade and agriculture at a tremendous rate!"

"He showed me something similar in two or three other cases," said Rush. "Important decisions, all to the same effect. Boys!" he added, triumphantly, "if language means anything, and if Chief Justice Shaw knew more law than the Argonauts, then this is not a navigable stream, and we have a right to dam it."

"What did he say to the orders sent us by the two towns?" Mrs. Tinkham inquired.

"He laughed at 'em. He said just what Mart said, — that they might as well order us to take our house or barn away. The fact that the dam has been there so many years without being seriously objected to makes our position all the stronger," Rush added, again referring to his memorandum.

"And the other question, — about defending it?" Mart asked.

"You have the same right which every man has to defend his property. You can use all the force necessary to drive away assailants. 'Knocking them on the head will be good for 'em.'"

Rush laughed as he read. He had even that down in his memorandum.

"I trust it won't come to that," drawled Mart. "But it's well to know just what our rights are. 'Strong reasons make strong actions,' as father used to say."

"And as Shakespeare said before him. Your father was a reader of Shakespeare," said Mrs. Tinkham. After a pause, she added: "But, oh, boys! it does seem as if there must be some way to settle these troubles without a resort to brute force! What did your uncle advise?"

"To keep within the law, and get along peaceably if we can, but to fight it out if we must."

"Exactly our p-p-position all the time," said Lute.

"He thinks we should try to influence public opinion by talking with prominent men, and by making a candid statement of our case in the newspapers."

"Excellent advice," said the widow. "I am sure the prejudice against us all arises from a misunderstanding. We will begin with that."

"We may as well reason with the w-w-wind," said Lute. "Though it won't do any harm to try. If we knew how to g-g-go to work."

"I 'll think it over," his mother replied. "We can do nothing now until Monday."

But before she slept that night the widow had written for the two-headed local newspaper an appeal to the public, full of plain facts and good sense, yet burning with the eloquence of a mother pleading for justice to her boys.

"One thing," Rush said to his brothers as they went out together, "I forgot to mention. See here!"

He picked up a small bundle, which he had dropped by the doorstep on returning home.

"What in time is it?" said Mart.

"It 's the lasso Cousin Tom brought home from Texas two years ago, and which he tried to teach us how to throw, you remember."

"The lasso! Ho, ho!" said Mart. "I do remember; and I don't believe I 've forgotten our practice, either."

"It 's the b-b-best hint yet," said Lute. "I wonder it had n't oc-c-curred to us."

"He said it might come in play," laughed Rush.

CHAPTER XXIII.

WHAT THE LOCAL EDITOR SAID.

MRS. TINKHAM'S appeal to the public having been read and approved by the boys, it was decided that it ought to go into the next issue of the Janus-faced newspaper. It was put into Rush's hands, and early Monday forenoon he took it to the printing-office in Dempford.

He found the editor in his shirt-sleeves, setting type for his paper with his own hands. As that guardian of the public interests of two towns seemed inclined to finish his stick before attending to other business, Rush could not help glancing at the "copy" he was at work on, — a strip of manuscript, stuck up before him on the case.

It was entitled, "A New Yacht and an Old Nuisance."

"Something for Mart's scrap-book," Rush said to himself. And, since it was evidently designed for the public eye, he ventured to read a little of it in advance.

He had skimmed along far enough to see that it was extravagantly laudatory of Commodore Foote and his yacht, and violently abusive of the dam, "which proved a serious hindrance to that fine new craft in its passage up the river last Friday," when the type-setter looked up and saw what he was doing.

But that personage did not appear in the least displeased; on the contrary, he smiled at Rush's indiscretion, remarking, —

"Guess that 'll tickle the boys some, won't it?"

"No doubt it will tickle a good many," replied Rush. "But there are some it won't tickle."

"Who are they?" inquired the editor, in some surprise.

"The Tinkham boys," said Rush.

"Who cares for the Tinkham boys?" said the editor. "They 've got no friends."

"They 're not overrun with them," said Rush. "If they were, I suppose we should see fewer articles of that sort."

"Well!" exclaimed the editor, turning, and for the first time looking the visitor full in the face. "I thought I knew you, but I see I don't. You 're a curiosity!"

"Am I, though?" said Rush, smiling.

"Yes!" said the editor, with good-humored frankness. "You're the first fellow I've seen take their part."

"You have n't seen me take their part," replied Rush. "Though I don't know why I should n't."

"You know them?"

"Pretty well. I ought to. I am one of them."

"Is it possible!" said the astonished local editor. "You! I thought they were great rough rowdies!"

"Am not I a great rough rowdy?" Rush asked. "Well, I have two brothers older and larger than I, but not a bit rougher or more rowdyish. I felt sure that you had been misinformed in regard to us, and for that reason I have called to see you."

"Walk in here; sit down," said the local editor, showing a door that opened into a small, littered editorial room. "I shall be glad to talk," removing some newspapers from a chair. "What can I do for you?"

"Justice, I hope. That 's all we ask."

Rush smiled to see that his presence was embarrassing to this disseminator of local prejudices.

"Here is a brief statement of the facts in our case," taking his mother's appeal from his pocket, "which we should like to have you print. If you will take the trouble to read it, you will see what I mean."

The editor looked it through with a perturbed countenance, then appeared to be bracing himself for an act of firmness.

"Do you expect me to put such an article as that into my paper?" he asked, turning to Rush.

"We hoped you would. We supposed you would wish to be fair to both sides."

"Fair — certainly! But" — the editor struck the paper on his desk — "I could n't print an article like that for any consideration!"

"Why not?"

"Because — obviously — don't you see? it would n't do!"

Rush persisted in wishing to know why it would n't do.

"You never had experience with a local weekly, or you would n't need to be told," said the editor, showing some irritation. "My readers would n't stand it, and it would make a hum about my ears that *I* could n't stand."

"Then you print only what you think will please your readers?" said Rush.

"In one sense, yes," replied the editor, frankly.

"Excuse me," said Rush. "I thought the business of a newspaper was to lead public opinion, and to correct it where it was wrong."

This was one of the phrases his mother had armed him with, and it came in aptly here. The editor colored deeply through his thick, sallow skin.

"That is incidental. We publish a newspaper mainly for the same reason that you make dolls' carriages."

"We try to make good, honest dolls' carriages," said Rush, "genuine in every part. We would n't make any others."

The editor coughed, colored still more confusedly, glanced once more at the article, and finally handed it back.

"I should lose forty subscribers if I printed it; and of course you can't expect me to be such a fool. I wish to be fair to both sides, as you say; but in this matter there is really but one side, — that of the public interest. Ninety-nine persons out of every hundred in this community wish the dam away, and I am not going to swamp my business by opposing them. I don't know anything about you and your brothers; I've nothing against you, personally. But you're in an unfortunate position, and you must get out of it the best way you can. That 's my candid opinion."

"Thank you!" Rush returned the paper to his pocket, and was taking leave so quietly that the edi-

tor followed him to the outer door, thinking he saw a chance for a little stroke of business.

"I believe your family is not represented in my list of subscribers."

"I rather think not!" replied Rush, with a smile.

"You 'll find my columns full of matters of local interest; always fresh and timely. I should like your subscription."

"We 'll think of it," said Rush, dryly, and withdrew in the midst of the editor's explanation that the Tammoset *Times* and the Dempford *Gazette* were the same paper, and they could have it, under either name, at two dollars a year, in advance.

"I 've kept my temper, and that 's about all I have done," thought Rush, as he walked away.

The editor meanwhile returned to his case of type, and resumed work on the "fresh and timely" article concerning "A New Yacht and an Old Nuisance."

The Tinkhams made two or three more attempts to combat the general prejudice, but succeeded only in discovering how strong and how widespread it was, and how completely men of influence were under its control. Politicians and public officers were, in fact, as fearful of losing place and votes as the editor had been of losing subscribers, by seem-

ing to favor in any way the cause of the widow and her sons.

Then came a sudden interruption to these efforts. A despatch was received announcing the death of Cousin Tom ; and the boys must attend his funeral.

"We'll risk the dam for an afternoon," said Mart, "no matter what happens."

The Argonauts had continued so very quiet, and the brothers had got the idea so firmly fixed in their minds that the next attack would be in the night-time, that they did not consider the risk very great.

All the family accordingly attended Tom's funeral, except the mother, who stayed at home on account of her lameness.

She afterward had reason to wish that she had gone, too. Better have been anywhere that afternoon, she declared, than at home without her boys!

CHAPTER XXIV.

WHAT HAPPENED THAT DAY.

THE children had been gone about three hours, when their mother, sitting at her window, which looked toward Tammoset village, noticed an unusal number of boys hurrying down the road toward the river.

Reflecting that it was the first of May, and probably a holiday in the schools, she thought little of the circumstance, until she saw groups of men also going in the same direction. She then hobbled to the front part of the house, where she could get a view of the bridge.

It was thronged with people, and more were coming from both ways, — from Dempford as well as Tammoset ; some stopping on the bridge and looking off toward the mill, while others climbed over the rails at each end, ran down the shores, and disappeared under the high bank by which the view of the river below was shut off from the house.

At the same time the kitchen girl began to call, —

"Mrs. Tinkham! Mrs. Tinkham! What are all these people doing out here by the mill?"

The widow hobbled to another window, and saw an amazing sight. Neither boy nor man had entered the yard in the regular way; but the upper bank was now alive with youngsters scrambling up from below. Some threw themselves on the turf, and sat with their backs toward the house and their legs hanging down the slope. Others stood behind them or looked about for better positions. A dozen or more got into the great willow, where they filled the seats or leaned upon the branches. All appeared eager to witness some great spectacle taking place below.

The mother of the Tinkhams knew very well what that was. "O my boys! my boys!" she exclaimed, "why are you not here?" And without waiting to cover her feeble shoulders and gray hair, she hobbled out of the house.

She heard suppressed cries of, "Look behind you!" "There comes the old lady!" and for a moment saw the faces of the intruders all turned her way. There was much silly tittering among them; and the next moment every boy was intently gazing down the slope again.

"What does this mean? What are you here for?" she cried, approaching the nearest group.

"We just wanted to see the fun!" was the grinning response.

"What fun?" she demanded, sharply.

"To see the dam tore away; for that's what they are doing," somebody answered, in a loud, insolent voice from the willow.

"Is that Dick Dushee?"

"Yes, that's Dick; he told us we could come up here."

"He would n't have dared show his face if my sons were home!" said the widow. "I should think he might be in better business, and the rest of you, too! Make room for me, will you? Whose ground is this, yours or mine?"

The loungers on the turf had not offered to move out of her way, but the lively movement of a crutch among their elbows and ears made them scatter, and she stood on the top of the bank.

This is what she saw.

Both shores of the river swarmed with spectators, boys and men, and even women and girls here and there. The platform at the corner of the mill was black with the crowd. There were boats, also, held against the current by young men aboard, probably Argonauts. In the midst of all, the centre of attraction, stood a line of stout laborers leg-deep in the

water, with picks and iron bars demolishing the dam.

The work had evidently but just begun. The first planks were yielding to sturdy blows. There was little noise besides; no loud talking nor shouting of commands. Never was disorderly crowd so orderly and well behaved. There were even policemen present, — Dempford men in blue coats on one shore, and Tammoset men in gray on the other, — keeping the peace. The whole thing had been thoroughly planned and organized beforehand, as the local newspaper boastfully informed its readers on both sides of the river in its next issue.

The crippled woman, supported on her crutches at the summit of the high bank, her gray head bare, — a strange, pathetic figure, — called aloud to the laborers to desist from their work of destruction. Not one of them heeded her; but all other eyes were turned upward, while her voice continued to ring out, tremulous yet clear, entreating yet commanding, —

"Must I stand here alone, and see my property destroyed? Is there not one who will take my part and stop this lawless proceeding? Are you all on the side of injustice and brute force?"

There was a brief silence; then a Dempford man

"With picks and iron bars demolishing the dam."
Page 200.

"It was thronged with people and more were coming."
Page 197.

n blue — our old acquaintance, in fact — made answer from the opposite shore, —

"It is not a lawless proceeding, madam. You were duly notified that the dam must be removed. As you have not done it yourself, the people have taken it in hand."

"The people who do it, or witness it without protest, are a mob! The only law they have on their side is mob law, and they know it. There is no other law that can touch my poor little property here. I see grave-looking men in this crowd, men who no doubt call themselves respectable citizens. Are they aware that, by their presence, if not by their acts, they are making war on a defenceless woman and her absent children? Well for you, well for you all," cried the widow, lifting a crutch and shaking it passionately over the heads of the crowd, "that my boys are not here to-day! You breaking the dam there, and you assisting by looking on, would not be where you are! But you chose a safe time for your brave deed!"

She stopped to subdue the passion that was swelling in her voice; then, as nobody answered her, and as the planks and stakes were still giving way before the picks and bars, she went on, —

"If this dam, which we have a right to maintain,

— for I have taken legal counsel on the subject, and I know, — if it troubles you, why don't you go to work like honorable men and get rid of it? I hear that some of you, who are not Argonauts, have yet subscribed large sums toward building the club-house. Why have n't you subscribed something toward abating this nuisance you complain of? A few hundred dollars would have bought off the previous owner; or my boys would have come to any just agreement with you. But, ah!" she cried, scornfully, "this is not the popular side! You can well afford to give money for a new boat-house; but one poor woman's mill-dam, that is in the way of a few pleasure-boats, must be ruthlessly destroyed! Oh, what men you are!"

Nobody answered her again. But, if there were not in that assemblage of two or three hundred people, young and old, a few hearts that felt and remembered long afterward her thrilling words and the tears that now came streaming down her cheeks, it was a pitiless mob indeed.

"I have had my say," she added, "and now you will do as you please."

Her cheeks still wet with unwiped tears, she stood in silence and saw the work of demolition proceed.

The planks and stakes, as they were broken away,

were sent floating down the stream ; and soon not a vestige of the dam remained visible. The end of the platform, with the fish-way attached, was left hanging in the air. The laborers seemed to think their work done, and started to wade ashore.

Then a little fellow about the size of Web Foote, standing in one of the boats, swung his hat and called for three cheers. The spectators responded, though not very heartily, their feeling of triumph being sadly chilled by the sight of the pale face and feeble form supported by crutches on the bank.

But now there was a singular movement on the farther shore.

A man with coarse, sandy features, of vast territorial dimensions, who had been watching the show with manifest satisfaction, said something in a low voice to somebody else, who whispered it to a third person, who in turn ran to the edge of the bank and called to the men wading ashore, —

"Go back! There 's one thing you 've forgotten!"

"What 's that, Milt?" asked the little commodore from his boat.

"The mud-sill!" said Buzrow, for it was indeed our amiable friend, the cow-smiter's son. "Dushee says they can rebuild the dam without any trouble, if we leave the mud-sill."

"Is that so, Dushee?" cried Web Foote, in a loud voice.

"Certainly it is," Dushee replied in a much lower tone, after some hesitation.

Even he must have felt the ignominy of openly giving counsel for the destruction of a dam he had formerly had to defend, and which he had dishonestly passed into other hands. Perhaps, also, his old hatred of the Argonauts made the situation awkward for him. But his present hatred of the brothers he had wronged outweighed other considerations, and he spoke out, —

"They have only to drive new stakes and nail on fresh boards. But rip up the mud-sill and spilin's, and they can't rebuild so easy, in the present state of high water."

"That 's so!" exclaimed Buzrow. "Up with the mud-sill!"

So the men went back into the water, and with their picks and bars attacked the long strip of timber which, with what Dushee called the "spilin's," — sharpened boards driven down several feet into the river-bed, — had served to keep the water and those pioneers of the water, the eels, from finding their way under the dam.

It was the hardest part of their job. The spilings

had been driven to stay ; and they were nailed to the sill. The tops of some of them broke off, however, while the old, rusty nails in the rest gave way ; then up came the heavy, water-soaked timber, one end first, and, slowly lifted and swung around, scarcely floating, went down the strong current after the stakes and planks.

So much the Tinkham boys had gained by making one superfluous enemy.

CHAPTER XXV.

TO RESCUE THE MUD-SILL.

AFTER the funeral, Mart and Lute stopped to do some business in town, while Letty and the three younger brothers hastened to take the first train for Tammoset.

"I've the strangest feeling," Letty said, "that something is n't right with mother."

"I don't see what can have happened to her," replied Rush. "But I can't help feeling skittish about the dam."

Starting to walk home from the Tammoset station, they were surprised to meet a number of people coming up the road, who gave them curious, excited looks. They hurried on, meeting more and more; and passing the brow of the hill, saw two scattered throngs moving slowly up both shores of the river, converging at the bridge, and from there streaming off thinly, in groups and pairs, toward Tammoset and Dempford.

"The dam! the dam!" exclaimed the boys, making a sudden onward rush.

All was over when they reached home. The last of the youngsters was slipping from the tree down the bank, on the summit of which the widow still stood, with gray head uncovered, propped upon her crutches.

"Mother! mother!" Rush exclaimed, springing to her side before the rest. "What is it?"

She was very pale, but quite calm now, until his coming caused her emotions to surge up again.

"You see what has been done," she said, pointing at the spot where the dam had been.

He gave a savage cry of grief and rage.

"There's nothing to be said," she continued, checking a sob, "but much to be done. Where are the boys?"

"They are coming in a later train. Oh!" exclaimed Rush, his face in a spasm of fury and pain, "if we had only been here!"

"It's well you were not. Better suffer wrong than to have killed some one or have been killed yourselves. For I am sure one of these two things would have happened!"

"Something would have happened!" said Rush. "Oh! to think you were here alone! You saw it all?"

"I saw it all!"

"And do you know who did it?"

"How could I? There were only two faces I ever saw before, — the Dushees."

Dick had already been discovered as he tumbled down the slope at sight of the boys; and Rupert and Rodman had been for giving him chase and throwing him into the river.

"Was the old reprobate here looking on?" demanded Rush.

"He was not only looking on, but you owe it to him that the mud-sill was torn up."

The wrong seemed too great to bear. Rush struggled with his bursting heart for a moment, then said, —

"Never mind! this is n't the end! Bring the clothes-line, boys! we 'll save what we can. Letty, help mother into the house!"

Letty, whom the boys had outrun, had now come up, and was clinging to her mother's side. Rush left them, and hurried down the path to the lower story of the mill, where he met our old acquaintance, the gray-coated Tammoset policeman.

The policeman smiled, — not at all like one caught in bad business, but rather as if he had been engaged in some praiseworthy action.

"I think," he said, "you will find your property

has been carefully protected. I have n't allowed anybody to go into the mill or to damage anything."

Rush regarded him with wrathful amazement.

"Perhaps you expect some reward from us?"

"I don't ask it," replied the man in gray, bowing complacently, with a look which implied that a reward would not be unwelcome. "I have only done my duty. The dam had to go, you know. We've seen the last of that."

"The last of it?" echoed Rush, with angry scorn.

"The last of it!" the man in gray repeated, positively. "An injunction will be applied for at once, to prevent you from rebuilding it."

"Why did n't you have the mill torn away, too?" said Rush. "Don't you see it projects twenty feet into the river? It may be in the way of some nice little pleasure-skiff, some time!"

He did not wait to hear the man's reply to this fierce scarcasm, but, having bent into a hook-like shape the end of a long iron rod which he found in the back shop, he hastened with it down the river, accompanied by Rupert with a pole and Rodman with the clothes-line.

They descried the mud-sill lodged in a bend, and some Argonauts in a boat poking one end of it, as if to set it afloat again.

"Let that timber alone!"

Rush sent his voice before him, while running with full speed. The Argonauts poked and pulled with their oars harder than ever.

"I warn you!" he shouted. "That timber belongs to me!"

As they did not desist, but seemed hastening to get the sill out of reach from the shore, he caught up a stone weighing three or four pounds, and, running up within hurling distance, flung it with all his might.

It struck the boat between wind and water, with a crash and a splash which sent the Argonauts paddling off in a hurry. Rupe and Rod, following along the shore, let fly smaller stones, one of which fell into the boat, while another went whizzing over two swiftly ducking heads.

"Thieves! robbers! cowards!" Rush shouted, having first thrown the hook-like end of his rod over the timber. "You do your dirty work in the night-time, or when only women are at home, but you run from two or three boys! Come back here if you want your boat smashed!"

"We've nothing to do with you," a big-voiced Argonaut shouted back. "Our business was with the dam."

"My business is with the dam, too!" cried Rush. "I know you, Milt Buzrow; and if I see you touch one of those planks by the shore down yonder, I 'll follow and stone your boat all the way to Dempford!"

Buzrow exhibited his courage by bellowing back some heavy threat; but for some reason he and his fellow-Argonauts did not think it worth their while to meddle with any of the drift-wood.

Rush called to his brothers, and with their help soon had the timber hauled alongside the bank.

"We won't try to get it home now," he said. "The tide will turn in a little while and help us. Stay here and hold on to it, while I go and borrow Mr. Rumney's boat."

He hurried back up the river to the bridge, crossed over, and found the farmer walking leisurely toward his barn. Rush did his breathless errand.

"My boat? What do you want it for?" Mr. Rumney replied, good-naturedly.

"Does it make any difference what I want it for?" Rush asked rather sharply, thinking his rustic neighbor was also in sympathy with the enemy.

"Wall, mabby!" said the farmer. "If you want it for any ordinary purpose, I say you can take it. But if you want it to save your timbers and put back your dam —"

"That's just what I want it for!" said Rush, with headlong frankness.

"In that case, I don't care to stir up the prejudice of the Argue-nots agin me. So I sha'n't say you can take it. But see here!" the farmer added, confidentially, as Rush was turning away in furious disgust; "if anybody should come and take the boat without leave, and never say I let 'em, they would n't be prosecuted. They 'll find the oars behind the hen-house."

"Thank you," said Rush.

"Don't thank me, for I don't know nothin' about it, you know. I've seen how you boys have been treated, and I should n't blame ye if you took any boat you could lay hands on."

The farmer was entering his barn. But he now turned back and added,—

"Or anything else, for that matter. By the way, did you know the Argue-nots are preparing to build a platform around the side of their boat-house? They've got the posts and lumber on the spot. Don't tell anybody I said that to you, neither!"

"I don't see what that is to us," Rush replied. "Though they rob us of our dam, we can't go and steal their stuff in return."

"Of course not," said the farmer, with a broad

and somewhat significant smile, — "of course not." And he entered the barn.

"He thinks we can destroy their property as they have destroyed ours," thought Rush, as he walked slowly back to the road. "And I am mad enough to! I should like to put a keg of powder under their boat-house, and blow it to the moon! Or sink the commodore's yacht in the deepest part of the lake!"

For the first time in his life he felt how revengeful, how desperately wicked, even an honest, well-meaning boy could be when fired by wrong. He wanted to go that night, and, by the help of a match and a few shavings, send the new boat-house roaring up into the sky in a wild cloud of smoke and flame.

But he had a steadfast, prudent nature, which helped him to put all such evil fancies quickly out of his mind. Beside, he had something else to think of now.

He had not wished to be seen going directly from Mr. Rumney's barn to the boat. He therefore walked back to the bridge; then, appearing suddenly to change his mind, he leaped the fence, ran to the hen-house for the oars, and a minute later might have been seen pushing off in the boat and rowing rapidly down the river.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THAT EVENING.

RUSH had taken his younger brothers on board, met the turning tide, and recovered much of the floating *debris*, — picking up the stakes and smaller pieces, and driving or towing the planks with the slowly backing current, — when Mart and Lute appeared, hurrying down toward the shore.

On reaching home and learning what had happened, they had made a hasty change of clothing, and Mart had put on what they called the "Dushee dug-outs," — a pair of enormous rubber boots, inherited from the former owner, and used, hitherto, chiefly in working about the dam in high water. They came up to the hips, and, having been designed for much stouter limbs, they made the lank Martin look, as he waded into the river, as if he were walking in a pair of churns.

Not a word of the great disaster ; but Mart simply said, "You 're doing well, boys ! " in quiet tones of approval, which it always did the younger ones good to hear.

No language, as Lute said afterward, would have done any sort of j-j-justice to the occasion. So, instead of wasting breath over the injury they had received, they set earnestly about repairing it.

The end of the clothes-line was passed on from Mart wading in the river to Lute on the shore; and boat and planks were towed back to the mill. There the fragments of the dam were heaped on the bank, and the mud-sill was also hauled up out of the water.

Bits of the spilings remained nailed to the side of the sill here and there. But they were few and small, the nails, when it was wrenched away, having in most cases broken or been drawn through the soft boards, — a fact which Lute observed with keen interest.

"What are the *spilings?*" Rod inquired.

Mart, who believed in explaining things to inquiring young minds, explained accordingly, — the more willingly now, because he wanted the younger boys to understand the sort of work in which they might be required to assist.

"In building a dam of this kind, the first thing put in place is the mud-sill, laid level across the river-bed. Then all along by that, on the up-stream side, they drive a row of boards, set closely edge to edge, the tops left even with the top of the sill, and nailed

fast to it. Those are the spilings, and they help hold the sill in place."

"Except when p-p-parties come and r-r-rip it out," suggested Lute, still studying and examining.

"The spilings are mainly useful," Mart went on, "to keep other parties, like muskrats and eels, from working under the dam. Eels are a kind of Arguenots; they claim a right of way, and when they can't wriggle through or over, they try to burrow beneath."

"One little hole in the b-b-bed of the river," said Lute, "the water makes it bigger, and the first you know there 's no b-b-bottom to your dam."

Mart then explained that the stakes were driven on the down-stream side of the sill, and that the boards of the superstructure rested on the edge of it, running lengthwise with the timber, and nailed to the stakes. The sill also served as a floor for the flash-boards to shut down on. All which the younger boys had some notion of before, and were to know pretty thoroughly by experience in future.

"Lucky for us the spilings were driven deep and half rotten," said Lute. "If they had n't been, they 'd have p-p-pulled up. I believe we can get the mud-sill back and make 'em do for a t-t-time."

"We could, if the tops of so many had n't been

broken," said Mart. "It will be hard fitting the pieces."

"We need n't fit the pieces," said Lute. "I 've an i-d-d-dea."

As Lute's ideas were always worth listening to, the others listened intently.

"Dig a trench," he said, "and sink the mud-sill eight inches. That will cover the broken p-p-parts of the spilings, and the ragged ends left sticking up over it won't do any hurt."

"Capital!" Rush exclaimed. "The row of spilings will guide us in digging the trench and replacing the sill."

Mart said nothing, but walked with a peculiarly earnest, expectant look straight into the river, and began to feel his way among the spilings with his clumsy boots.

"I believe you 're right, Lute?" he said. "If it was a time of low water, we could do it at ebb-tide without any trouble."

The tide was but just coming up now, and yet, owing to spring rains, the water where he stood was nearly two feet deep.

"It 's a bad-looking job," said Rush, "with only one pair of Dushee's dug-outs among us! The water is awfully cold yet. I wish it was later in the season."

"We can build a temporary dam, just a light fence to keep the most of the water off, while we're at w-w-work," suggested Lute.

"If we had boards enough," said Mart.

"Plenty of b-b-boards."

"I don't see that. These old planks are so split and broken that only a few will do to use again. And though we have looked out for having boards enough on hand to rebuild the dam, we have n't enough for a temporary dam at the same time."

"Plenty of b-b-boards," Lute repeated, confidently. "Rip the siding off the sheds."

"So we can!" exclaimed Rush. "And put it back again when the temporary dam comes away."

But Mart raised objections.

"The old dam," he said, "was fifty feet long. The mill projects into the river twenty feet. That makes something like seventy feet from bank to bank. And the temporary dam would have to be three or four boards high, to keep the water from pouring over."

"I don't propose to build from bank to bank," Lute explained. "I would start the temporary dam at the corner of the mill, just above the permanent one, and run it across a little diagonally, to give us room to work between them."

"But the water will come tearing under, I know!" said Rush.

"Yes, it will b-b-bother us. But we can stop it with more boards, and relieve the pressure by letting it through the mill-sluice. That's one advantage of starting the temporary dam at the corner of the mill. It won't take long to drive stakes and string it across."

Still Mart objected, believing that the temporary dam would cause more trouble than it would save, and preferring to work in the water.

The difficulties in the way of either plan were formidable enough. The brothers were still arguing the question, when Letty came to tell them that, for their mother's sake, they must come in to their supper, which had been a long while waiting.

"Well," said Mart, "it's so late we can't do much more, as I see; and we can talk over plans in the house as well as here."

The supper-table conversation that evening was wonderfully cheerful and quiet, considering the circumstances. The wrong which had been done them knit more closely the sympathies of mother and children; they were never before so united, hardly ever so happy. The spirits of the young men had risen to meet the emergency; their hearts had grown great.

"The more I think of it," said the widow, with glistening eyes, "the more thankful I am that you were not at home this afternoon. If you had been, we should not be sitting here together now, all safe and well, with clear consciences and sound limbs, — I am sure we should not!"

"I am frightened when I think what might have happened!" said Letty. "What if one of you had been hurt, as I know you would have been, before the dam could ever have been torn out!"

"We should n't have looked on with our hands in our p-p-pockets," said Lute, soaking a crust of dry toast in his chocolate. "That is n't the T-T-Tinkham style."

"Or suppose you had hurt somebody else?" said the mother; "perhaps fatally, and were now in jail, with the terrible prospect of a trial! Oh! how much better we can afford to lose a little of our property, or even all, and begin the world again with clean hands. We have suffered a great wrong, but that is better than to have done even a little wrong. We won't complain of Providence as long as our hope and strength and love remain, and we are left to one another."

"I don't know what makes me so glad!" exclaimed Letty. "I never was so proud of my brothers. I

never felt so sure that they would come out all right at last!"

"It's no use giving in to t-t-trifles," said Lute. "We mean to have our dam again, and k-k-keep it, next time."

"We've been pretty indulgent to the Argonauts," said Mart. "We've allowed them two chances at us, — one when we were asleep and one when we were away. That's about enough. Now let 'em look out! Piece of gingerbread, please, Letty."

"How long will it take to rebuild the dam?" Letty asked, as she passed the dish.

Mart was explaining that it would depend upon circumstances, when Rush spoke up, —

"That reminds me of what the policeman said, — some nonsense about an injunction being applied for at once, to prevent our rebuilding it. They can't, can they?"

"Say it again," replied Mart. He paused, holding the gingerbread he was about to break, and listened seriously while Rush repeated the officer's words. "I don't exactly like that!" he drawled.

"Is there anything in it?" cried Rush, in a tone of alarm.

"I don't know, but that's very likely their game. Now the dam is torn away, the court may possibly

clap on an injunction to prevent our rebuilding it. Then we may have to wait for a long course of law to decide the matter. I don't know about it; and while we are waiting to consult Mr. Keep, their trap may be sprung. I prefer to be on the safe side."

"What is the safe side?" Rush inquired.

"An injunction," said Mart, "is a writ to probibit your doing something which somebody complains will damage public or private interests. Now, suppose, before such a writ is issued, the thing is done? That 's what I call the safe side for us."

"You mean to rebuild the dam before we are ordered not to rebuild it!" said Rush. "But can we? The order may come to-morrow morning!"

"Yes, or a notice that it has been applied for. Then the rebuilding would be at our own cost and peril. Boys," said Mart, starting up, "we have n't a minute to lose!"

"No," said Lute. "There 'll be a moon. We must w-w-work to-night!"

The brothers were on their feet in a moment, eager, even to the youngest, to begin the tremendous task of circumventing the enemies of the dam. Amidst the sudden clatter of chairs and clamor of voices, the mother uttered her remonstrance.

"Oh, boys," she said, "rest to-night and do your work to-morrow! That will be better, I'm sure."

"No, mother!" replied Mart, with a quiet laugh. "To-morrow may be too late. We 'll work to-night, and rest when our work is done."

CHAPTER XXVII.

RUSH HAS AN IDEA.

A BUSY night began. A lantern was lighted, and lamps were carried to the mill. The two younger boys were sent to the village for a pickaxe and a spade and some galvanized nails, while the two older ones began at once to saw joists and sharpen stakes.

Rush left them sawing and trimming, and arguing again the question of a temporary dam; and taking the lantern, with a hammer and a hatchet, went out to the pile of fragments below the mill.

He set the lantern on the ground, and was occupied in clearing the mud-sill of old nails and bits of broken spilings, when a sound of oars working in their row-locks told him that a boat was coming up the river.

He heard voices, too; and these words, though spoken in a low tone, were borne to him distinctly over the water: —

"It will take 'em at least three days to rebuild it,

even if they have a chance. But they won't have a chance."

"No, sir! There's no dam to bother us to-night, and there never will be again!"

"Keep quiet! There's a light in the mill, and there's one of 'em with a lantern!"

The voices ceased suddenly, and Rush, who all the while kept quietly at work, heard no more until the boat drew near the mill. Then some one on board called out derisively, —

"Where's your dam?"

"It will make good fire-wood," said another, "what there is left of it."

"Stop your nonsense, boys!" said a third. "Don't hit fellows when they're down."

Thereupon Rush straightened himself up from his work, and stood beside his lantern, hatchet in hand, and gave the passing boat a haughty look, with these words, —

"If you think the Tinkham brothers are down, you'll wake up some fine morning and find yourselves mistaken. Don't keep any of your insolence corked up on our account. We can stand it."

He got no reply; but heard low voices again, after the boat had passed a few rods up the river.

"That's the bloodthirsty one that was going to

knock Milt on the head with a bean-pole, and hove the big rock at his boat this afternoon."

"Yes! and he looked just now as if he'd a little rather fling his hatchet at us than not!"

Rush went on prying off the broken ends of the spilings. He fancied the boat passing the bridge, and wished for a moment that he was there with another "big rock," to drop down gently and softly on the Argonautic heads.

Then suddenly a startling thought flashed upon him. He rose, gazed excitedly up the river, then, stooping again, drew out and hammered down the last of the nails.

This done, he stepped into Mr. Rumney's boat, which had been hauled up beside the mill, placed the lantern low in the stern, with some broken boards to hide it, pulled into the current, and followed the other boat at a cautious distance.

His absence was soon noticed by Mart and Luke; and as he did not return for nearly half an hour, they grew more and more surprised at his going off in that mysterious way, when time was precious.

At length he returned and walked into the mill, where he found them still preparing material for rebuilding, and discussing plans. When asked where he had been, he replied with a counter-question, —

"Have you decided about the temporary dam yet?"

"I rather think Mart agrees to it," answered Lute, "though he has n't said as much yet. I know he hates the n-n-notion."

"If we 're going to lay the mud-sill in the night, I suppose we must manage somehow to keep the water back," Mart admitted. "But I 'm afraid Lute's plan won't work well, and I hate to strip the siding off the sheds."

"Well! cried Rush, with a joyous countenance, "you need n't! We 'll get along without Lute's temporary dam. And we 'll plant the mud-sill without having much water to work in, either! The Argonauts are going to help us!"

"This is a poor time for a j-j-joke," said Lute, reproachfully.

"It 's no joke at all," Rush replied, with eager confidence. "I 've looked the thing all over, and I know what I 'm talking about."

Mart laid down a piece of joist he was shaping into a stake, and regarded his brother with solemn scrutiny, saying, after a pause, —

"The boy is certainly crazy!"

"Hear my plan first," cried Rush; "then, if you don't say we can get the mud-sill in without trouble

or danger from the water, and have the dam all built before high-tide to-morrow morning, I 'll give you leave to put me into a strait-jacket."

"Some folks say the age of m-m-miracles is n't over," was Lute's cool comment; "and now Rocket is going to p-p-prove it."

"Go ahead," said Mart, "before I make any more stakes. We 've got enough for the permanent dam already."

"You won't need any more, I promise you."

The brothers listened, at first incredulously, then with a respect which quickly grew to admiration, as Rush proceeded to convince them that he was not crazy, and that the plan he proposed was in no sense miraculous.

"Well, I declare, Rocket!" exclaimed Lute, "you 're a chip of the T-T-Tinkham block! How did you ever happen to think of it?"

"Why, just as either of you would, if you had been in my place," Rush replied, not at all anxious to gain extraordinary credit for a scheme which his older and more ingenious brothers had failed to hit upon. "I was trying to think of some trick I could play off on the Argonauts when it popped into my head."

"It never would have p-p-popped into a foolish head!" exclaimed Lute.

"Nor into a very crazy one, for that matter," Mart added. "I owe you a humble apology, Rocket."

"Pshaw!" laughed Rush. "It's all right, since you see it as I do."

The three were earnestly talking over details of the plan, when the younger brothers returned, bringing the pickaxe and spade and the rust-proof nails.

"They knew at the store what we wanted of 'em," said Rupert. "One of the men asked if we were going to build up the dam again to-morrow, and I told him I did n't know."

"That's right, for you don't know," said Mart. "Nobody can tell what may happen then, or between now and then. Now you youngsters go to bed."

"Oh, no!" Rupe exclaimed, in astonishment.

"We are going to stay up and help," said Rodman. "Why can't we?"

"There 'll be nothing you can help about for three or four hours," Mart explained. "All we can do before ebb-tide is to get ready. If you stay up, you 'll be all tired out by that time, and good for nothing. But go to bed now, and I 'll have you called at twelve or one o'clock. It will be moonlight then; you 'll be fresh after your nap, and I promise you some fun."

"Will you surely call us?" asked Rupert.

"Surely, unless the bottom drops out of our scheme, which does n't look likely now. Have your old rubber boots ready to put on, — for you may have to stand in mud and water, — and your worst old clothes. We are going to put ours on."

"Well, don't forget to call us. Come, Rod!"

The two youngest returned reluctantly to the house, and went to bed. Excitement kept them awake for a time, and they seemed hardly to have fallen asleep when they felt somebody shaking them, and heard a voice exclaim, —

"Wake up! wake up, boys! You 're wanted at the dam!"

Opening their sleepy eyes, they saw in the moonlit room a dim figure bending over them. It was Letty, who had sat up with her mother, waiting for a signal from the mill to call the sleepers.

"We 've only just come to bed," yawned the confused Rodman.

"You 've been in bed four hours," cried Letty. "Now make haste, or the dam will be built before you get there."

They were well aroused by this time; and quickly putting on their old clothes and rubber boots, they ran out to the bank of the river, where they looked down on what appeared a scene of enchantment.

It was a night of wonderful stillness and beauty. The moon was high in the cloudless eastern heavens, flooding the valley with its mild radiance, by which they could see, beyond the black shadow of the mill and in strange contrast with it, a sheet of water, flashing with snake-like curves and streaks of silver fire. It was not much more than ankle deep to three figures that now appeared in the moonlight, crossing the plashy and glimmering river-bed.

Rupe and Rod ran down the bank, marvelling more and more. There was no temporary dam to be seen; and yet that pool, or rather series of pools, connected by little runnels, shining here and there amidst the black and oozy bottom, was all that was left of the Tammoset River. The appearance of fiery snakes was caused by the sparkling wakes and ripples of hundreds of alewives, with perhaps a few eels and other fish, darting and writhing about, in the endeavor to escape into deeper channels.

"Where's all the water?" cried Rupert, splashing in where the older boys were at work.

"Be quiet!" said Rush, in a low voice. "The Argonauts are keeping it back for us."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

HOW THE ARGONAUTS HELPED.

THE older boys had evidently been busy while the younger ones were asleep. They had, in fact, not only got everything in readiness for rebuilding the dam at low water, but, after putting out the lights in the mill, they had embarked on what Rush called an Argonautic expedition.

There was no regular meeting of the club that night; but it was to have been expected that a good many members would get together, to enjoy the triumph they had that day achieved in the destruction of the dam. The upper windows of the boat-house were lighted and open, and loud talk and laughter resounded within, when the Tinkham brothers rowed noiselessly by in the Rumney boat, making careful observations, and waiting for the Argonauts to disperse.

The tide had turned before they left the mill. It would soon be going out rapidly. The time had come for them to begin their secret night's work.

Yet nothing could be done until the last of the Argonaut's boats had gone down the river.

The boys grew exceedingly anxious and impatient, as they floated about under the shadow of the high shore, and counted the wasting moments.

"They never stayed so late before," said Rush.

"They must crow and crow again over the old dam," replied Mart. "Don't begrudge 'em that short-lived satisfaction."

"There goes a b-b-boat," said Lute.

In fact, one, two, three boats put out from the shadow of the club-house, crossed the moonlit arm of the lake, and disappeared at the outlet.

"There were only three moored at the float," said Rush. "The way will soon be clear now."

At the same time the Argonauts could be heard leaving the house on the shoreward side, and talking and laughing as they went up the lane to the road. Still, lights were seen and voices heard within.

"See here, boys," said Mart, "we're losing too much time. It won't do!"

"We must r-r-risk something or miss our chance," said Lute. "Don't the fools know it's time all honest folks were abed?"

A bold stroke was finally resolved upon, and the boys paddled silently up to the side of the club-

house, where the platform lumber of which Mr. Rumney had told Rush lay half in moonlight on the bank.

While the lamps still shone and voices were heard from the open windows overhead, one by one, eight boards, each twelve feet long and a foot in width, were slid down into the water, placed one upon another, and lashed together. Then three stout poles were selected from a pile designed for posts to be driven down into the mud for the platform to rest on, and launched in like manner without noise. This done, the boat was pushed silently off, boards and poles following darkly in tow.

A shout of laughter from the windows rang out over the water as the Tinkham brothers, now in their turn, emerged from the shadow of the boat-house and rowed across the moonlit arm of the lake.

Reaching the outlet, they pulled with strong strokes, in the full, slow current, down to the bridge. Under that they paused, and drew the boards and poles alongside.

"So far, so g-g-good!" chuckled Lute.

The abutments had been already examined, and the bed of the channel explored and cleared of loose stones. A pole was now drawn forward and set in an upright position, slightly leaning, against the

upper side of the bridge. Rush and Lute held the boat against the stream, while Mart thrust the pointed end down into the gravelly bottom.

A second pole was then placed still more slantingly, a few feet nearer one of the solid granite abutments. To these two uprights the boat was made fast, broadside to the stream, and all hands were free to work.

A board was now forced down edgewise, extending from the first post to the abutment, to be supported by them against the pressure of the current. The second post was just outside of the board; it served as a guide in placing it, and held it fast when it was down. A heavy sledge-hammer was used in the water, with a sort of churning stroke, in driving the lower edge of the board into the bed of the river.

A second board was placed in like manner as the first, a third on that, and finally a fourth put into position; the upper edge of the last rising four or five inches above the surface of the water.

The entire span of the bridge measured not more than twenty feet, so that now the boys had only to extend a similar set of boards from the first post to the other abutment in order to have a complete gate across the channel.

They had worked cautiously at first, listening often

for footsteps approaching the bridge. As none came, and it was getting late, they grew bold in their movements, and worked rapidly, until, as Mart was setting his third post in place, somebody looked over the edge of the bridge and called out, "Halloo!"

All was still in a moment, except the gurgle of the water against the side of the boat. The boys, hidden by the shadow beneath the bridge, kept quiet until another head peeped over, and another voice said, —

"What are you doing down there?"

Then Mart answered back, in as gruff and careless a tone as he could assume, —

"Did n't you ever see anybody spear eels?"

"It's a queer place to be spearing eels, and a queer way to do it," said one of the voices above. "Look at that big pole!"

"There 's two more!" said the other voice. "They 're setting some sort of trap to catch alewives. Come along! it 's awful late!"

The voices went off with the sound of hurrying footsteps, and died away in the distance. The brothers breathed again.

"They are Dempford Argonauts footing it home," said Rush.

"'What are you doing down there?'"—Page 236

"Good fellows!" said Mart, resuming his work. "They help us best by lending their lumber and getting out of our way. Now give us a board."

The current was growing stronger and stronger all the while, and by the time the third board of the second set was in place, the water poured over it in a cascade. A fourth shut it off; and then the sledge-hammer was used again to drive each set of boards firmly together and settle them still deeper into the level river-bed. The water under the bridge fell away rapidly, the boat dropping with it, and the brothers had the satisfaction of seeing their extemporized gate emerge before them like a dark wall.

As the pressure of water held the boards in place, the two outside posts were now set inside, in a row with the first, as assistant supports; and Mart, getting upon the bridge, drove one after another with all his might into the bed of the channel.

"Now, boys!" he said, jumping down from the abutment, "we must make the most of our time! I won't warrant either of those posts to stand long, after the water begins to tear its way under."

CHAPTER XXIX.

REBUILDING THE DAM.

THEY hastened to the mill, and floated the mud-sill in place while there was yet water enough in the fast-draining channel. It was a foot deep when they began; it was not much more than ankle-deep by the time they had got ready to make the trench for it.

On the arrival of the younger boys, Mart and Lute and Rupert began at once, with pick and spade and hoe, to dig out the gravel beside the old spilings; while Rush, with Rodman's assistance, carried out a plan suggested by Lute for getting rid of more of the water.

It was a modification of Lute's first idea of a temporary dam. The mill-sluice was opened, and the water that came down from above drained into it by means of a diagonal line of boards set up edgewise and supported by short stakes. A hatchet and a hoe in lively hands made a quick job of it; and some of the same boards served which were afterwards to be used in the dam.

"We sha'n't care much for the water, you know, after the mud-sill is laid," said Rush; "then those boards can come up."

Meanwhile, the simple device was found exceedingly useful. For though the water came down for a time in a constantly dwindling stream, it began at length to increase in volume, showing a considerable escape at the bridge. The drain turned it easily into the sluice, however; so that in throwing out the loosened gravel the spade and hoes kept the trench also tolerably free from water.

The moon shone brightly. It was not very hard digging, and in an unexpectedly short time the new bed was made ready for the mud-sill. This was then pried into it, one side being set close against the spilings, and secured in its position by stakes driven close against the other side. Each stake was then firmly nailed to the sill.

"This is j-j-jolly," said Lute. "Now if we can only get the spilings nailed before there 's a d-d-deluge!"

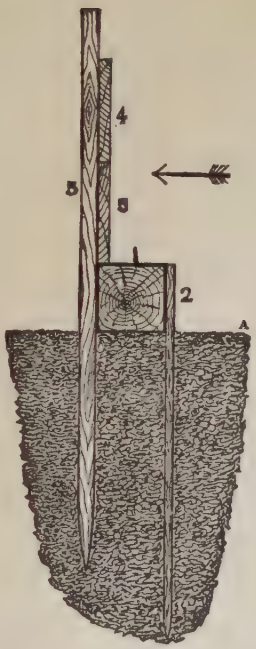
To do that the boys had first to dig out some of the gravel on the upper side of the spilings. These they found in quite as good condition as they had expected, and the sill being laid below the line of broken tops, only two or three had to be patched.

Never did young fellows work with greater energy and speed. As they were now engaged on the shady side of the row of spilings, Rod held the lantern ; and the digging done, Rupe handed nails for the older ones to drive.

A strange sight they must have been in their rubber boots, splashed clothes, and brigandish hats, there in the glimmering river-bed, by moonlight and lantern light, if only Dempford and Tammoset had been awake to see! But all around them the two towns lay fast asleep, while the secret night-work went on.

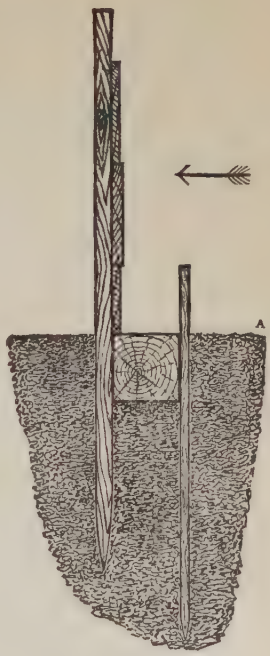
The rapid hammering made merry music to the boys' ears ; for they now felt that the most difficult part of their task would soon be over. Rush kept the water scooped out of the new trench in advance of the nailers, and filled in the gravel after them. The sill, which had originally rested on the river bottom, was now sunk to a level with its surface, only the notched ends of the line of spilings being left sticking out, " Like the back fin of a b-b-buried sea-serpent," Lute said.

More than once in the mean time Rush had to spring to his line of boards, which an ever-increasing flow of water threatened to wash away. He, however, managed to keep them in place until the sill



SECTION OF DAM AS ORIGINALLY BUILT, SHOWING STRUCTURE.

1. End of the mud-sill, eight inches square. 2. Edge of row of spilings or boards driven down several feet into the river-bed beside the mud-sill, and nailed to it. 3. Stake driven down on the other side of the mud-sill, and also nailed to it. 4, 5. Ends of planks nailed to stakes, forming the breast of the dam. A is the bed of the river. The arrows show the flow of the stream.



SECTION OF DAM AS REBUILT BY THE BOYS.

The mud-sill is here shown sunk below the level of the bed of the river, with the top of the spilings left sticking up. An eight-inch board at the bottom, a foot board at the top, and the old plank between, now form the breast of the dam, of the original height.

and spilings were safe, and the mud and gravel packed against them.

Then the boards were to be nailed to the stakes. And though that part of the work might have been done in the water, it could be done much faster out of it; and no time was lost in running on the first tier.

There had been originally two tiers of foot-wide planks above the sill. But now the sill had been sunk, and in order to make the dam as high as before, three tiers would be necessary. For the first, the boys used some narrower stuff they had, running it clear across the flash-board opening. The best of the old planks served for the second. Finally, for the upper tier, the boards were taken from the diagonal drain. And it was time. A rush of water was sweeping them away.

"There must be a big wash-out under the Argonauts' gate!" Rush said. "Do you suppose there 's any chance of the abutments being undermined, or that the bridge will be in danger?"

"Let 'em be undermined!" exclaimed Lute, "and let the b-b-bridge be in danger! What 's that to us?"

"Good enough for Tammoset and Dempford, for tearing our dam away!" said Rupe.

"Besides," said Mart, with a nail in one corner of his mouth, "after the bridge is gone, the little commodore's yacht can pass with the mast up. That's to be considered."

No serious fears for the bridge were entertained, however; and it was hoped that the gate would hold until the flood-tide came to carry the borrowed lumber back up into the lake.

As soon as the spilings were nailed, the two younger boys had got a basket and a garden rake, and gone to catching fish. The rake served to snatch them out of the shallows in which they were still flopping, and the basket was before long filled with fine alewives, measuring nearly a foot in length. As they were taken on their way up into the lake to spawn, they were in excellent condition. Eels, too, might have been secured, if the boys had known how to hold the slippery creatures or to keep them in the basket after they were caught.

One thing of interest they fished out of a puddle; it was neither an eel nor an alewife, but a small sledge-hammer which had been missing from the back shop ever since the night when the blades of the mill-wheel were broken. This discovery confirmed their belief that it had been stolen for the occasion, and afterward flung into the river.

Birds were now singing, and the brothers had the growing daylight to finish their work by. The platform and fish-way were repaired. The dam had no "apron," as Lute declared it ought to have, and should have some day, to prevent the water that poured over from washing out the river-bed below, Dushee's way having been to fill with stones and gravel any holes thus formed.

It was sunrise by the time the last plank was sawed, and the end of the dam against the Dempford shore stanched with stakes and earth. Then the tide came up, meeting the water that came down, and forcing it back. The boys put away their tools and stood on the platform, splashed and muddied, but picturesque and triumphant, regarding their completed work.

"Now let 'em come on with their writs to prohibit us from doing what is already done!" exclaimed Rush.

"Writ or no writ," replied Mart, wiping his bespattered face, "it 's something to say the dam was back again by daylight the morning after the two towns had their big jubilee tearing it away."

"Besides," said Lute, "it will let 'em know the T-T-Tinkham brothers are no t-t-triflers. Now hurry in, boys, with your fish, and tell mother we and the dam are right-side up with c-c-care."

The widow had been up nearly all night, keeping

her chair or her lounge, and sleeping little, while anxiously awaiting the result of her sons' extraordinary undertaking. Great, therefore, was her joy when the younger ones came in, announcing its success, and lugging their basket of fish.

Letty had gone to bed, but she, too, was now awake, and had to get up and rejoice with her mother over the good news. Then the three older boys appeared, begrimed and streaked from head to foot, from old slouched hats to rubber boots; haggard but hilarious, hardly knowing they were tired, but knowing very well they were hungry, and eager for congratulations and gingerbread.

The pride and happiness of the little household did not, it is to be presumed, prove extensively epidemic in the two towns, when it was discovered and told swiftly from mouth to mouth that the dam, after being destroyed with such pomp and circumstance, had been replaced as if by magic in a single night.

What the Argonauts thought of it after their late jubilation does not appear. Some glimmer of light is perhaps thrown upon the subject by an article from the local newspaper, which I find pasted in Mart's interesting scrap-book.

Much the larger part of it was evidently written and set up in the silent hours of that same moonlit

night when the Tinkham brothers were busy with their magic. A glowing description is given of the magnificent uprising of the sister-towns, and the inspiring spectacle of their united people gathering in majesty and might, and putting an end to a grievance which had been too long endured.

Only brief allusion is made to the appearance of the crippled mother on the bank, — "a somewhat painful incident, which marred the otherwise perfect satisfaction which must have filled every patriotic heart on this glorious occasion."

Then follows this postscript: —

"Since the above was put in type, we have learned with very great surprise that the dam has been rebuilt! Unable to credit so astonishing a rumor, we despatched our reporter to the spot early the next forenoon, not doubting that those who started it were deceived by some illusion. He found it only too true! The dam had been entirely reconstructed within twelve hours of the time when at least two hundred people looked on and saw it, as was supposed, finally and forever destroyed!

"How the feat was accomplished is a complete mystery. There is evidence that the water was stopped at the bridge. Persons were heard at work under it late that night, — 'spearing eels,' they said.

Some lumber belonging to the Argonauts was found adrift in the lake the next morning, bearing such marks of rough usage that there is no doubt it had played an important part in this strange drama. It is believed that it was placed across the channel, between the abutments, by means of posts, one of which still remained in position against the upper railing of the bridge at ten o'clock the next morning. The rest of the temporary gate, if there was one, had been carried up into the lake at flood-tide. The posts — the ends of which were found battered, like the edges of some of the boards — had also been borrowed of the Argonauts. To make the members of our honored boat-club contribute in this way to the rebuilding of the dam was a piece of impudence which may be termed simply colossal.

"Our reporter states that many Tammoset and Dempford people visited the locality in the morning, to assure themselves, by the testimony of their own eyes, that the dam was indeed there. Comments were various. If the young mill-owners worked all night in replacing it, it would seem as if they must have required rest the day after; but at ebb-tide the mill was going, and they were busy at work as if nothing unusual had happened. The general impression seems to be that, whatever else may be said of them, they are smart."

CHAPTER XXX.

CALM BEFORE STORM.

IT was true enough that the mill was going again that forenoon "as if nothing unusual had happened." Such rest as the boys got must have been taken before ten o'clock; for at that hour, the tide favoring, flash-boards were set and wheels and lathes merrily whirling.

"The editor ought to have added," Mart pencilled at the bottom of the article in his scrap-book, "that the T. brothers did not lose the use of their water-power for even five minutes in consequence of the dam's having been torn away. It was ready again, and so were we, long before the water was."

To add to their triumph, the court refused to grant the injunction against rebuilding, which was actually applied for before it was known that the rebuilding was an accomplished fact.

Their position appeared now to be stronger than ever. They were running their mill in open defiance of all the power and influence that could be brought to bear against them by the Argonaut Club

Lute and Rush gave their leisure moments to building a boat."—Page 249.

and the authorities of both towns, yet not in defiance of what they firmly believed to be law and justice.

Tranquil days followed. The boys were able to keep their engagements, and also to start some new projects. In the midst of all, Mart found time to finish a wheeled chair he had for some time been making for his mother; while Lute and Rush gave their leisure moments to building a boat.

The chair was a comfortable as well as a very ingenious affair; and never was there a happier family than when, one Monday morning in May, the widow took her first airing in it, attended by all her children. She could easily work the levers and propel the wheels herself; but, bless you! the boys would not allow that, while they were there to compete for the pleasure of pushing it. And oh, what a day it was! The air was soft and fragrant with blossoms. The door-yard turf was starred with bright dandelions. The pear-trees were like white bouquets; the apple-trees pink with just opening buds. And the great willow was, as Letty said, "one glory of young leaves and yellow tassels."

The edge of the still river below — for it was full tide — was laced with the golden pollen which every breeze shook down, and the boughs were filled with the summer-like hum of bees.

To and fro, along the edge of the high bank and then about the garden, the widow rode, "like a queen in state," she said, enjoying every sight and sound and sweet scent wafted by the wind, yet taking more delight in the society of her children than in all beside. Letty wished her to see the bed of pansies; but she found more pleasure in the rows of peas, now well up, because they were the first things ever planted by the younger boys, and they were, oh, so proud of them!

Then she returned to the bank above the river, and sat there, looking at the water and the landscape, and hearkening to the bees and the talk of the young folks, until the church-bells began to ring.

"It's a long time since I have been to church," she said, with a sigh.

"Well, you can go, now you have your c-c-carriage," said Lute.

"Any of us will be proud to be your horses," Rush added. "Will you try it next Sunday?"

"I'll see. I should like to have the Tammoset and Dempford folks know that we are not such heathens as they seem to take us for."

"There are some Dempford heathens for you," said Mart, from the tree, looking down the river.

"Members in good and regular standing of the Argonaut Club," said Rush.

"It 's the B-B-Buzrow," remarked Lute, adjusting his spectacles. "I wonder if he has got his c-c-crow-bar with him."

Buzrow did not have his bar; or, if he had, he did not attempt to use it, under the eyes of the young Tinkhams in the tree. His boat, containing two young Argonauts besides himself, passed quietly up the river, to the widow's great relief.

"They don't ask me where our dam is, as they did that night," laughed Rush. "They must love the sight of it!"

"However that may be," said the widow, "I hope and pray that they have made up their minds to let it alone!"

"You hope too m-much, mother," said Lute. "They 've no more concluded to let it alone than we have to let it be t-t-taken away."

"What 's that under your feet, Martin?" the widow suddenly asked.

From her chair at the end of the plank she had discovered that the hollow formed by the circle of branches at the top of the immense willow trunk was filled with pebbles and stones, — many of them as big as boy's fists.

"These?" drawled Mart, looking down, with his knee on one of the seats. "They are the boys' ammunition."

"Ammunition!" exclaimed Mrs. Tinkham.

"Of course, mother!" cried Rupert. "And this tree is our fort. "If there 's another attack on the dam, you 'll see! Rod and I brought the stones up here in baskets, to be all ready."

"This is the way! Look, mother!" said Rod, in the tree. And catching up one of the pebbles, he flung it at an imaginary enemy.

He peered eagerly between the branches till it struck the water just below the dam; then dodged behind a seat, as if expecting a shot in return, at the same time catching up more pebbles.

"Stop, stop, child!" said the widow, smiling in spite of herself at his lithe attitudes and alert spirit. "If people should see you, they'd think we were heathens indeed!"

Meanwhile Buzrow was saying to his companions in the boat, —

"That dam makes me mad as I can be every time I pass it. To see it still there, after all that 's been said and done, and the sassy fellers on the bank laughing in their sleeves at us, — it 's a disgrace to the club! it 's a disgrace to the town!"

"You promised to tear it away yourself," said Ned Lufford. "We all supposed you would."

There was a tinge of sarcasm in the tone in which this was spoken, and the cow-smiter's son noticed on Ned's face a smile he did n't like.

"So I would, if I had n't waited for the club to take action," he replied, his course features reddening to the complexion of a dingy, overgrown beet.

"You waited for the club, and the club waited for the two towns, and the two towns waited till the mill-owners were away and only a crippled woman at home," said Ned, with a laugh.

"Then a gang of hired men did the work," added George Hawkins. "And see what it all amounts to! The dam was back again in ten or twelve hours, and there it 's likely to stay."

"No, sir!" said Buzrow, bringing down that brawny fist of his with an emphatic blow on the gunwale of the boat. He felt that he was losing influence with his companions, and that some decisive step must be taken. "I 've stood it long enough! If we can't tear that miserable dam away as fast as five boys can rebuild it, we 're a lot of figgerheads and don't merit the title of a club anyway."

"We have n't gained much by swapping commodores, as I see," Ned Lufford said. "Web can brag, but what does brag amount to?"

As Buzrow had been rather louder than anybody else in the said matter of brag, he felt himself lashed over Web's shoulders.

"And what 's the use of a mill-dam committee?" said George Hawkins. "Is it going to take all summer to talk over measures, as they call it, for getting rid of a dam the owners rebuilt in one night?"

"The owners did n't stop to talk," Ned Lufford added, "but went to work like plucky fellows! Are the committee afraid of 'em? Scuse me, Milt! I 'd forgot you was one of the committee."

Whether he had forgotten it or not, Lufford evidently, like Hawkins, took pleasure in goading their companion.

"I am one of the committee!" Buzrow exclaimed "And I 've tried my best to bring the boys to decide on something. Now, I don't wait no longer for them, nor for the club, nor for the towns. If I can get ten or a dozen fellers to go with me some night, I 'll engage to have that dam away before the Tinkhams can wake up and rub their eyes open. Of course, you 'll agree to be one, Ned? and you, George?"

After such remarks as they had indulged in, the two could not reasonably decline.

"Now, here are three of us pledged!" said Buz-

row. "And we can get seven or eight more easy enough. We must go in strong force, so as to do our work up in good shape and make it a sure thing."

"I suppose it will be as well to get the committee to move, if we can," suggested Lufford, with rapidly cooling zeal.

"And hit upon some plan for ripping out the whole thing, and not simply breaking a few boards and stakes," added Hawkins. "There 's no use o' that."

"Not without we do it often enough to make the Tinkhams sick of their bargain," Buzrow admitted. "But I 've got an idea. No noise — no danger — just a little preparation — then, presto! out goes the dam in a jiffy! We don't leave the mud-sill to be put back again, neither!"

"Tell us about it!" both friends exclaimed, their zeal kindling again at the thought of the work being accomplished so melodramatically, yet without peril to themselves.

And Buzrow proceeded, with solemn charges of secrecy, to unfold his plan.

CHAPTER XXXI.

AN ATTACK.

IF the plan was a good one, and a sufficient number of volunteers were found for putting it in execution, then they must have had to wait some time for a night favorable to their enterprise. Two weeks went by, and the Tinkham brothers were still left in tranquil enjoyment of their water-power.

Lute was generally the one who slept in the mill, not only because a peculiar sensitiveness to sounds seemed to have been given him to compensate for his nearness of sight, but also because, as he averred, he had got used to his bed of shavings, and rather liked it.

He had one night lain down, as was his custom, with his clothes on, — merely kicking off his shoes and placing his spectacles on the end of the work-bench, — and had slept comfortably about three hours, when he was awakened by a sound like the clanking of a chain.

He was on his feet in a moment; but in his eager-

ness to get his glasses, he knocked them off the bench into the bed of shavings. He lost no time searching for them, but hastened to the open window on the side of the dam, and softly put out his head.

There was a moon somewhere in the sky, but it was a cloudy, drizzling night, and without the help of his glasses he could not distinguish one object from another. But again he heard, though not so plainly as before, a sound like the muffled clanking of a chain.

It seemed to be on the farther bank of the river; and, listening intently, he believed he could hear footsteps moving about. Then came a little splashing of the water, quite different from the murmur of the outgoing tide where it poured through the opening in the dam.

Lute stepped quickly to the end of the bench, found the twine looped over its nail, and drew it tight with a single firm but gentle pull. That was the signal for secrecy and haste.

A responsive pull, not quite so gentle, assured him that Mart was roused. He then groped in the shavings for his spectacles, found them, and put them on. By that time, Mart had awakened Rocket, who in turn shook the sleep out of Rupe and Rod; and such

a scrambling for clothes, and such a tumbling out-of-doors ensued, as that old house had never before known.

Lute was at the window again, with all his senses alert, when Mart, half dressed, in shirt and trousers and shoes, came swiftly and without noise into the mill and glided to his side.

"What 's going on over there?" Lute whispered. "Do you see something?"

Dim objects could be vaguely discerned on the opposite bank, and a dull tramping sound was heard, heavier than that made by any ordinary human footsteps. Then a light clicking or jingling, as of a trace or some part of a harness.

"Horses!" breathed Mart.

"Horses and men!" whispered Rush, who was at the window almost as soon as his brother. "The shore is covered with 'em!"

Then once more the splashing at the farther end of the dam; and Lute told of the clanking sound by which he had been awakened.

"I believe they 're trying to hitch on to the mud-sill and drag the whole thing out t-t-together!" was his shrewd comment.

"That 's their game!" said Mart.

He turned to the two younger ones, who were also

crowding to the window by this time, and gave them swift orders what to do. While they hastened to execute them, he reached for an old shop-coat that hung over the work-bench, and put it on. This he did that he might be a less conspicuous object to the enemy, when the time should come to expose himself, than he would be if seen in his white shirt-waist.

Lute had guessed well the design of the Argonauts. Their plot had been well laid, thanks to wiser heads than Buzrow's; and it might easily have succeeded but for an unforeseen circumstance. To get a log-chain around the mud-sill, hitch to it the powerful truck-horses hired for the occasion, and then, by one strong, steady pull in the right direction, tear away the whole structure at once, breaking stakes and spilings, or pulling them up, — a bright idea, was n't it? Well, this was what Buzrow had heard somebody say should have been done before when the dam was destroyed, and which it had been determined to do now.

Then the wreck, so the Argonauts reasoned, could be dragged off down the bed of the river by the horses, still attached, taken to some convenient spot, and there broken up and burned or set adrift, at leisure. Any number of volunteers might have been enlisted in what promised to be so glorious an enter-

prise. But in order to insure secrecy beforehand and silence on the spot, only a dozen picked Argonauts had been let into the scheme.

They were now on the Dempford shore, with the three draught-horses and their driver, a spade, an auger, and a chain, and bars and axes to be used in an emergency. The tools had been brought in a boat, which was hauled ashore a little below the dam. The spade was for digging under the mud-sill, the auger for boring holes in the boards above and the spilings below, and the chain for passing through and locking around afterward.

This was to be done near the end of the sill, but not too near, lest the chain, in hauling, should slip off. A spot was selected about four feet from the bank. The spilings were found, and gravel enough got away from them to give the auger room to work. To bore a hole or two under water had been thought easy enough, and a much more silent operation than knocking away the boards with axe or bar.

But now the unforeseen circumstance played its little part.

Buzrow, booted and clad for the occasion, like the rest, stooped in the water, which was not now nearly so high as when the dam was first torn away, and plied the long-stemmed auger.

But neither Buzrow nor any of his fellow-Argonauts had fully taken in the fact that the mud-sill, which before lay on the bed of the river, was now sunken well into it. Consequently, he bored his first hole into the timber, instead of simply boring through the spiling under it. A second hole was no more lucky. Then the spade had to be used again, to get out more gravel. At last, however, he hit the right place. Another hole was made in the board that rested on the sill. Then the chain was worked through both holes and locked about the timber.

At last everything was ready. The horses, harnessed tandem, were to start on the bank, in order to give the sill an upward slant that might draw out the spilings with it; they were then to be turned into the bed of the river, and driven off down-stream, hauling after them the dam, or as much of it as should hold together.

The driver waited for the word. Buzrow took hold of the heavy rope, which extended from the last whiffletree, in order to hook it to the chain. But the delay had caused the horses to grow impatient in their strange situation. Having started a few steps forward, they had now to be backed up again. Buzrow was straining at the rope with one hand and holding

the chain with the other, and two or three Argonants were helping him, — six inches more and the rope would have been hooked, — when thud! patter! splash! came a volley of stones.

One hit Buzrow on the back. But he still held out and would have hooked the chain, had not another struck the rear horse. That started him up again; and Buzrow, even if he had had the strength of the man whose fist knocked down a cow, could not have clung to both rope and chain at once, without having those burly shoulders of his dislocated. He dropped the chain, and tugged at the rope until it was jerked from his hands, and he found himself hurled headlong against the bank in a heap with the assisting Argonauts.

"Whoa! whoa!" he muttered. "Can't you hold your horses?"

Evidently the driver could not, or did not care to, with more stones striking the animals' flanks and hurtling mysteriously about his own head.

There was an ignominous retreat, in which Buzrow himself was glad to join; and, in less than half a minute, not a figure of man or beast was to be seen by the Tinkham boys from the other shore.

There was a rally at the boat, where Buzrow and the boldest of his followers tried to induce the truck-

man to go back with his team and make another trial.

"We can hook on in a second," Milt said. "Then let the horses run, if they want to! Who cares for a few stones?"

The stones had in fact ceased coming, and everything was quiet in the direction of the mill.

"If you care so little for the stones," the teamster finally said, "go and make a diversion by attacking the other end of the dam; draw their fire, so my hosses will stand till we get hitched on. I'll agree to that."

A confused discussion followed. Some were for gathering "rocks" to throw at the mill; to which others objected that the volley which drove them off did not come from the mill at all, and that breaking a few windows would not do much toward breaking the dam. Their business was with that.

"We must decide on something," said Ned Lufford, "or we may as well give up and go home."

"Go home and leave that dam there!" exclaimed Buzrow, stung to fury by the hurts he had received and by the thought of such failure. "Never! Come on, boys!"

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE BATTLE OF THE DAM.

"WHAT are you going to do?" asked George Hawkins.

"Make a diversion, as Balch says. Two of you help him hitch on to the chain. I and four or five more will pitch into the dam with our axes and bars, while the rest of you find out where the rocks come from — if any more come — and have some to fire back."

Immediately all the Argonauts, except Buzrow himself, began to search for projectiles along the shore. To choose one's position and skirmish with stones seemed a much more attractive part than to walk boldly up to the dam and be stoned. Naturally, almost any boy would prefer it; and the Argonauts were human.

Then, when Buzrow put a stop to that nonsense, as he called it, and appointed only four skirmishers, all the rest wanted to assist in attaching the horses to the chain. But that would n't do, either.

"Let George Hawkins and Frank Veals go with Balch," he said. "They understand it. The rest come with me!"

While the others were gathering stones, Buzrow had taken the opportunity to stuff a big boat-sponge into the crown of his felt hat. They had no such defence against dangerous missiles, nor did they know what made him so ready to lead them into battle. No doubt they supposed it was the native Buzrow courage. But I suspect it was the boat-sponge.

"It won't take half a minute!" he declared. "As soon as the team starts and the dam begins to crack, we're out of the way!"

Those he called upon could not well refuse to follow his heroic example. They armed themselves with axes and bars, buttoned their coats, turned up the collars, and pulled their hats over their eyes. The water was nowhere leg-deep, and all had rubber boots on.

"All ready?" said Buzrow.

All were ready. They stood in the rain, facing the dam, and waiting for the word to charge. Nothing could be seen before them but the dim outline of the shore, the pale glimmer of the river, and the gloomy mass of the high bank beyond. In that

deep shadow the shape of the mill could hardly be discovered.

Balch and his team made a detour. The skirmishers advanced noiselessly up the bank. Then Buzrow, having allowed the horses time to get abreast of the dam, gave the word, —

"Now, boys!"

And the intrepid six rushed into the river. To attract attention, they made all the noise they could on their way to the dam, hoping it would begin to go before they had a chance to attack it. But Balch and his assistants were not quick enough for that.

Carrying his head well before him, conscious of the boat-sponge, Buzrow made a lunge at the dam with his bar, — not at the end nearest the mill (perhaps out of deference to Rush and his well-remembered bean-pole), but yet far enough from the Dempford shore to divert the expected volley of stones from that quarter.

Excellent strategy in that respect it proved; though the credit of suggesting it belonged not to the warlike Argonauts, but to the dull-witted driver of draught-horses.

Buzrow's followers fell in at his right, considerately leaving him the honor of standing at the post of greatest danger, on the side of the mill. At the

first stroke upon the dam the stones began to come, all in the direction of the attacking party in front, not one straying far enough to interfere with the more important movement on the flank.

Whiz! thump! splash! crash!

The sounds made by the missiles mingled wildly with the noise of bars and axes smiting the dam. At the same time, the skirmishers, perceiving by the way the stones struck the water that they must come from the shore above the mill, opened a heavy return fire in that direction, without, however, silencing the Tinkham battery.

Still the mud-sill did not start, although in the excitement of battle it seemed to Buzrow that there had been time enough to pull the whole thing away.

At the very beginning of the attack he had been hit on the shoulder. A second stone struck his left arm, — a stinging but not a disabling shot, — the perverse projectiles appearing to alight anywhere except on the sponge-stuffed cushion prepared for them.

"Why don't they hitch on?" he furiously exclaimed. "We must fall back if they don't!"

Ned Lufford had already fallen back, dizzy and staggering from the effect of a well-aimed pebble

which found no boat-sponge inside his hat. One or two others were faltering.

Meanwhile, something quite different from a pebble had once or twice touched the back of Buzrow's upturned coat-collar, and slipped away so lightly that he thought nothing of it.

It came from the doorway of the mill, and was quickly drawn back in that direction. Then it shot out again invisible, the long arm also invisible which projected it over the platform.

Then two hands hauled in, — with something to haul this time.

The lightly flying, unseen object was a lasso, which, after twice missing the mark, had dropped its insinuating, supple noose over the sponge-protected head and tightened at the chin below.

Buzrow gave a suppressed yelp, dropping his bar and throwing up both hands, and in an instant started toward the mill in a most astonishing fashion.

The two hands hauling were Mart's. To them was now added another pair; and never did huge, floundering fish emerge more suddenly or more helplessly from the deep than Buzrow the valiant tumbled out of the shallow river upon the platform and into the clutches of his captors.

In vain his hands caught and struggled at the lasso. It had found a tender spot just above the coat-collar and under the chin, and to avoid instantaneous choking he had been only too ready to follow whither it led.

The Argonaut who stood beside him heard the short and quickly choked yell, and observed his sudden strange movements. Not knowing the cause, he drew the too hasty inference that Milt had been seriously hurt and that he was plunging to the shelter of the mill.

He started to follow. A third Argonaut followed him. But just as the two latter neared the platform, crack! crack! fell something more substantial than a lasso on their unprotected heads. Flashes of fire were instantly knocked out of them, together with all ideas of seeking shelter in a quarter which dispensed hospitalities of that sort.

They recoiled, reeling and stumbling, into the river. One dodged under the platform, just as the gasping and flopping Buzrow was hauled headlong over it into the mill. The other recovered himself and took to flight, keeping step to a vigorous tattoo on his back and shoulders, played by a bean-pole instead of a drumstick.

Then Rush stood alone on the platform (not

knowing what was under it), brandishing his weapon, ready for fresh comers.

No fresh comer appeared, the remaining Argonauts at the dam also plashing off in a panic-stricken way down the river.

Still the mud-sill did not move! The reason for this was that the boys could not hitch to the log-chain. The reason why they could not hitch to it was that that there was no log-chain there! For this, also, there was a very excellent reason.

The strategem by which the fire of the Tinkham battery was to be diverted was good, as I have said, as far as it went. But a counter strategem had gone beyond that.

While the Argonauts were rallying at the boat and gathering stones on the beach, Lute had crossed the stream under cover of the dam, found the chain in the water, unlocked it, and pulled it away. He had then pushed back the loose gravel against the sill with his feet, and afterward recrossed in safety and silence before the final attack began.

Much time was lost by Hawkins and Veals in searching for the chain; then a good deal more in exploring for the bored holes, which Lute had covered. For they now hoped to get the rope around the timber in place of the chain, and haul it off in that way.

But things happened too fast for them. The Argonauts had retreated from the dam, and Buzrow was a captive in the mill, bound hand and foot, and admonished still further to keep quiet by a noose about his neck, which could be so easily tightened in an emergency! Rupe and Rod were thus left free to turn their attention to the men and horses on the bank, who were soon glad enough to retreat again out of range of the pelting stones.

Meanwhile, the skirmishers, finding their pockets nearly empty of ammunition, had reserved their last volleys until they perceived, from their position above the dam, that some action was taking place at the corner of the mill.

"There 's where the rocks come from!" said one. "Let drive, boys!"

The action was already over, however. At the first stone, Rush stepped quietly inside and closed the door. A second came through the open window, but hurt nobody. A third struck the platform; while others, aimed too low, seemed to take effect under it. For now the poor fellow crouching there ran out, wildly shrieking, "It 's me, boys! it 's me!" and made off with a great splashing, amidst the last volleys fired by his brother-Argonauts.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

VICTORY.

MRS. TINKHAM had been awakened by the boys leaving the house, and much of the noise of the conflict had reached her ears. She was up and dressed, with lamp lighted, waiting in extreme anxiety, when Rupert came running into the house. He was breathless with haste and excitement. Before he could tell his news, she knew it was good news.

"We 've beat 'em off!" he panted. "They 've hurt the dam a little. But we don't care for that. We 've got one prisoner, — Buzrow, — the worst rowdy of 'em all!"

"Anybody hurt?" was the widow's anxious inquiry.

"Nobody on our side; only one stone glanced from a limb and hit me on the leg. But I didn't mind it a bit! Rod and I were in the tree, and we let 'em have about a bushel of stones. Nearly all they fired at us came too low; we could hear 'em

strike the trunk under us, or thump against the bank."

"And your prisoner?"

"Mart caught him by the lasso over his neck. He and Lute got him into the mill, and kept him well choked till he gave up. Then he begged like a good fellow; but they would n't let him off. And what do you think we found in his hat, after we got the lantern lit? A sponge as big as your head, such as they use for sopping out leaky boats! His hat had dropped off on the platform, where Rocket found it."

"Have the rest gone away?" asked the mother.

"We don't know. They may come around again, and try to rescue Buzrow. I must hurry back, to help fight 'em if they do. The boys are on the look-out; but they told me to run in and tell you we 're all safe. Mart has got his lasso ready to catch another Argonaut if they give him a chance."

"Are any of *their* side hurt?"

"I hope so! Buzrow got a jolly choking, anyway. And Rocket thrashed two with a bean-pole. And I 'll bet our stones hit a few heads and shoulders! Oh, I tell you, it 's the greatest fun you ever saw!"

And before she could ask any more questions, the wild youngster rushed out again.

Meanwhile, the lantern was placed on the platform, and lighted lamps were set in the windows of the threatened tide-mill, to shine up and down the river.

"We may as well let folks know we are at home and prepared to receive company," said Mart.

This bold course disconcerted the Argonauts, who were even then planning an assault, with the view of carrying off the captive. Still they did not give him up; but instead of making a fierce onset, they advanced within range of the misty rays, as if for a parley. Rush, posted in shadow, saw them coming up the Tammoset shore. Mart went out promptly and demanded what they wanted.

"We want the fellow you 've got there in the mill," said Ned Lufford, halting at a safe distance, a little in advance of his comrades.

"You make a rather cheeky request," Mart replied. "We came honestly by him, — as the woman said when she found a frog in the milk, — and we mean to keep him. Not that we really care any more for him than the woman did for the frog; but she thought he would do to show to the milkman."

"If you won't give him up peaceably," said Lufford, "we will break in the mill and take him by force."

"That's a trick you're quite welcome to try," Mart answered, his drawl sounding oddly in contrast with the Argonaut's blustering tone. "We've handled you chaps as tenderly as a cat carries her kittens, so far; but attempt to break doors, and you'll wake up in a hospital and find something else broken. Meanwhile, you are respectfully informed that we have room for three or four more quiet and well-behaved prisoners, and can take 'em, too, if as many of you should care to set foot on our premises!"

Mart stood where a lamp at the window shone upon his shoulder and side, and the Argonauts could see that he held something like a coil of stout cord in his left hand. The mysterious manner of Buzrow's headlong plunge into the mill required no further explanation.

"Do you want anything more?" Mart asked, after they had remained a few moments in consultation. "If not, excuse me if I don't waste any more time in the mere forms of politeness."

He went back into the mill, and, after a little delay, the Argonauts disappeared behind a clump of willows.

They still lingered near their boat, and presently had the satisfaction of seeing him and Lute come out

on the platform, get down into the river, and with stakes and boards proceed to repair the dam by the light of the lantern.

It was soon patched. Then the flash-boards were set, and the water being shut back, the Tinkhams, lantern in hand, appeared to be looking for something in the draining bed of the stream. At the same time, the boat was becoming hopelessly grounded.

"I can't stand this any longer!" exclaimed George Hawkins.

"Nor I!" said Frank Veals.

And yet the Argonauts did stand it long enough to see the brothers pick up two axes and a crow-bar and heave them in at the mill door.

"We ought to have swooped in and stopped that!" said Ned Lufford.

And now that it was too late, he did make a feeble movement toward the mill, followed by his comrades. Mart turned and faced them, in the halo made by the lantern in the drizzling rain.

"Stop there! and tell me what you want!"

Hawkins stopped, and finding himself in an awkward position, said, —

"Take out your flash-boards and give us water, so we can float our boat."

"That's a humble and not very unreasonable request," Mart replied. "We've taken out our flash-boards for you, with all the good-nature in the world, on various occasions. Very likely we shall do it again, but not at this hour of the night, now or any time. We'll give you water, though, in another way."

He had re-entered the mill, and the humble petitioners were wondering what he meant, when the water-wheel began to splash and turn, and a scanty stream came gurgling down toward the stranded boat.

"The mill is going!" said the astonished Argonauts.

It was going, indeed, and it continued to go during the remainder of the night; the Tinkhams, with characteristic "impudence" (the local newspaper's word), having resolved to make the most of their time while guarding their premises and their prisoner.

Buzrow, seated on the floor, with his back against Lute's work-bench, to which he was fast bound, had an excellent opportunity of seeing how extremely impudent they were.

"If you're b-b-bright," Lute remarked to him pleasantly, "you may pick up a little of our trade. It's a very good trade when it is n't interf-f-fered with."

Buzrow, in his sullen rage, did not look as if he cared to pick up anything but himself just then, or to interfere with anybody's trade in future.

The younger boys kept their mother informed of what was going on, and it was not long before they announced that they had heard the Argonauts dragging their boat away down the river. Balch had gone off with his team long before.

In fact, no rescue was attempted, — a wise determination, as Buzrow himself was obliged to admit afterward, having seen how dangerous it would have been to attack the brothers in their own mill.

Daylight came, the tide turned, the mill stopped, the lights were extinguished, and the Tinkhams had not only their dam in good repair, but some useful work and a prisoner to show, as a reward for their trouble.

It seemed a great triumph. Yet the sequel must be told.

"They had a lively following of youngsters at their heels."— Page 279.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE PRISONER.

AFTER congratulations and rejoicings, and a deliberate breakfast, Mart and Rush set off in a slow, dull rain to march the cow-smiter's son (his hands still tied behind him) to Tammoset village and the house of Judge Hanks.

Early and rainy as it was, they had a lively following of youngsters at their heels before they reached the door; and Buzrow, who was only too well known to them as a Dempford boaster, was greeted with, "Turn up your cuffs!" "Scratch your nose, Milt!" (the nose, by the way, was battle-smeared); "What be ye goin' to do with them two chaps?" "Does your mother know?" and other like soothing remarks.

Judge Hanks was a conscientious justice of the peace; yet he, too, was under the influence of the popular prejudice against the dam. He was much disturbed when called from his breakfast-table into his office-room and informed of his visitors' business.

But he could not refuse to hear the complaint against Buzrow.

"Untie his hands first," he said. "Proceed in the proper way."

"If we catch a marauder destroying our property in the middle of the night, is n't the proper way to tie him and take him before the nearest magistrate?" Mart inquired.

"You have a right to capture him," Judge Hanks replied, "but you have no right to hold him a prisoner any longer than is necessary. Untie him!"

"I hate to do it about as badly as the old miser hated to buy his wife shoes," Mart dryly remarked; "but we 'll have everything proper, judge."

Manifestly the knots were not made to untie, and he used his knife. He then made his formal complaint, while Buzrow stood by, gloomily rubbing his wrists.

"Whereabouts in the river do you say he was?" Judge Hanks stopped writing, to inquire.

"Not far from the middle, but I should think a little nearer the Tammoset side," Mart answered.

"Are you sure?"

"Well, I 'm not positive as to that. I only know he came to our side pretty quick after he was noosed!"

Buzrow, being asked if he wished to make any statement, began with the old hackneyed denunciation of the obstruction in the river. The judge interrupted him.

"On which side of the centre of the river were you? I wish to know" — this was spoken very significantly — "which town the offence was committed in. Was it Tammoset or Dempford?"

Buzrow took the hint "In Dempford," he answered, stoutly.

Could he swear it? He could swear it. Judge Hanks then said, —

"The complainant is uncertain which town the offence was committed in, but thinks it was in Tammoset. The defendant is positive it was in Dempford. Dempford being in another judicial district, this court has no authority in the case. It is accordingly dismissed."

"Is this — what you call — the proper thing, judge?" Mart asked. "Ain't it a funny kind of law?"

"How so?" said the judge, severely.

"Why," Mart explained, "if it could be proved he did the act with one foot in Tammoset and the other in Dempford," — he illustrated his point by setting two fingers astride a crack in the judge's table, —

"then, I suppose, you would have jurisdiction over one leg," — lifting a finger, — "while the Dempford court would have jurisdiction over the other leg," — comically crooking up finger number two. "Funny kind of law, judge, I should say!"

Even the court had to smile, and there was a broad grin on the blood-smeared Buzrow countenance, as the bearer, who had, perhaps, the best reason to laugh of anybody, walked out of the door a free man.

The Tinkhams had still further experience of the curiosities of the law when, complaint having been duly made before a Dempford magistrate, warrant issued, and offender arrested, they confronted him on the evening set for his examination.

Lawyer Snow, employed by Buzrow, cross-examined Mart.

"Which side of the river was he on when you saw and captured him?"

"Very near the centre," said Mart; "but he says he was on the Dempford side."

"No matter what he says. I want to know what you say."

"He swore before Judge Hanks —"

"I don't care what he swore before Judge Hanks! Which side of the centre of the river do you say he was on?"

"I am willing to take his word in this matter," said Mart; "though perhaps I would n't in anything else."

"We want *your* word, and no hearsay evidence," said the lawyer. "Did n't you swear, in your complaint made to Judge Hanks, that you thought the defendant was nearer the Tammoset than the Dempford shore? Did you or did you not?"

"I did," said Mart. "But he swore —"

"No matter what he swore there! He will have a chance to swear here, if he wishes to."

But it turned out that Buzrow did not wish to swear at all, now that he was in a Dempford court of justice. Consequently, as there was no evidence that he had committed any offence in that town (the Tinkhams being unable to summon any of his companions as witnesses), the case was again dismissed.

Yet the brothers enjoyed a moral, if not a legal triumph. Mart had an opportunity to describe in open court, in the presence of spectators, the manner in which Buzrow was lassoed and bound, how the sponge was found in his hat, and how he was marched into Tammoset village that rainy morning; which, with other particulars, related in the oldest brother's droll way, covered with ridicule the braggart Buzrow, and did not greatly help the cause of the Argonauts.

One point especially served to extinguish the boaster's pretensions.

"I suppose I ought to have been afraid of his fists," Mart said, incidentally, describing the capture; "for I had heard they were like his father's, and that his father once knocked down — "

"Never mind about that!" broke in Lawyer Snow, amidst an uproar of laughter.

Mart had said enough. Buzrow never liked to hear the feat of the paternal fist alluded to after that.

Seeing that the public enjoyed a good laugh at the burly pretender, the local editor had the tact to print a pretty full report of the trial, which now lies before me, filling a page and a half of Mart's scrap-book.

The same number of the paper contained an advertisement of articles found by the Tinkham brothers:

"The boat-sponge Mr. Buzrow carried in his hat. Left on the premises.

"Two axes and a crow-bar, picked up in the river. One axe badly damaged.

"Also a log-chain, found locked about the mud-sill. In good condition.

"All which the owners can have by calling at the Tinkham Brothers' mill, proving property, and paying for this advertisement."

Needless to say, the articles were never called for.

CHAPTER XXXV.

A BOAT-LOAD OF GIRLS.

AND now the dam got into politics. Crow-bar and log-chain measures had so far failed. The injunction business had fallen through. Strenuous but futile efforts had likewise been made, as the brothers learned, to have it indicted as a nuisance by a grand jury.

So now, Tammoset and Dempford were clamoring to have it abolished by statute!

The next election of representatives to the State Legislature was to turn upon this important question. All other issues were to be sunk, and no candidates countenanced who were not pledged to "some measure for promoting the free navigation of our beautiful river."

"An act defining navigable streams in terms broad enough to cover our beloved Tammoset is what we demand, and what we are bound to have. Look to it, voters of Tammoset and Dempford! Who shall carry our banner the coming year?"

The local newspaper furnished a good many para-

graphs of this sort, which the Tinkham brothers read with amusement and cut out for their scrap-book.

And the tide-mill was still going

Business was good. The pin-wheels, rocket-sticks, and other wooden fixtures were finished and delivered to Cole & Co., to be manufactured into fire-works for the "glorious Fourth." From dolls' carriages, the brothers advanced to baby carriages; and Lute was inventing an improved seed-sower, of which he got a hint while watching the farmers at their work.

The boat was also completed and launched, and named the "Letty"; and on a still evening, just at sunset, Letty, with Mart and Rush and Rupe, made a trial trip in it on the lake. They floated under the overhanging trees; they landed to pick ferns and wild flowers; even Letty tried her hand at the oars; and all agreed that no better boat ever sailed on a lovelier sheet of water.

And now, in the fine June weather, the widow spent many an hour with Letty in the willow-tree, and enjoyed more than one enchanting row, at sundown, on river and lake.

The Tinkhams were beginning to be respected. Mrs. Tinkham went to church in her wheeled chair, with Lute and Letty, and the minister called on her.

"They landed to pick ferns and wild flowers."— Page 286.

"Perhaps he expected to convert you from the evil of your ways in maintaining a d-d-dam," said Lute.

But the conversion was on the other side. "I found her a remarkably intelligent, fine-spirited woman," the parson was reported as saying. "As for the mill question, she is in the right from her point of view. She has a very interesting family."

Then the wife of a prominent physician called. "Partly in the way of business, I suppose," Mrs. Tinkham smilingly explained to her children. "We are naturally looked upon as the doctor's possible patients."

The mill troubles had kept the younger children from entering school. But since the rebuilding of the dam — admired as a heroic feat even by its enemies — the acquaintance of Rupe and Rod had been sought by neighboring boys not in the club. Their popularity now extended even to Tammoset village, where the capture of Buzrow melted many hearts.

Then what a day it was when Tilly Loring came up from Dempford in a boat, at flood-tide, with three other girls, stopped at the mill, and inquired of Rush — who went out to them, with joyful trepidation — if Letty was at home.

Letty was at home. He made the boat fast to the platform, and steadied it while they got out. And

what a happy, foolish, blushing boy he was, in his paper cap, with paint on his hands, which he awkwardly wiped on his workman's frock, and yet did not dare offer, by way of help, to one of those light-footed, disembarking girls!

He was not afraid of Miss Loring. Oh, no! Nor of her friend, Sarah Ball, whom he had seen with her once or twice in the city. But there was something about the other two girls which made him almost think they regarded him as a joke.

A dazzling vision of one of them had appeared to him before in that old mill. How well he remembered the charming Syl Bartland, who had brought her brother's message! The other was her companion of that day, whom he did not see, and who was so piqued at having missed seeing him.

If Rush had known how much they had talked of him and his brothers and their exploits, and how nervously eager, yet half afraid, Miss Mollie Kent had been to meet him, he would have guessed why they looked so amusingly conscious of hidden fun, and he, too, would have wanted to laugh.

Tilly Loring took her companions up the path over the bank, and then what little screams and kisses and joyful exclamations there were, as Letty met them at the door!

They were not gone long. They could stay but five minutes, they said. But Letty would not let them off so. She took them to the seats in the willow-tree, after they left the house ; and the charm of the place or of their own society was such that there they remained for at least half an hour longer, making a picture to the eyes and music to the ears of the boys behind the open windows of the mill.

The mill was not going, and if the brothers had stopped hammering they might have heard every word that was said. They were, indeed, tempted to listen, when the talk grew lively and loud on the subject of the Argonauts and the dam.

"Well, I vow!" exclaimed Lute, "that sister of the late c-c-commodore actually stands up for 'em."

"Was it she who said the most of 'em are good fellows and want only what is right?" Mart asked. "Well! that may be so, but they've an odd way of showing it."

Rush would n't believe it was Miss Bartland who said it. But Lute was sure.

"The r-r-rest," he insisted, "are all on our side. I 'm confident they are. I g-g-guess Tilly has talked 'em over."

At length the girls left the tree, and Letty took them into the mill to appeal to her brothers on some

point in dispute and to show where Buzrow had been caught.

Once in the mill, they became interested in other things. Rush was painting a doll's carriage ; and Syl Bartland, with the prettiest arch smile, asked him to explain how the wheels were made, — merely to make him talk for Mollie Kent, he half believed.

Then some of Lute's toys attracted attention, one especially which he was at work on at the time.

He called it a water-glass. It was like a big tunnel, two feet long, except that the smaller end was shaped to fit a pair of eyes, and in the large end a disk of plain glass was fitted. On one side was a handle.

It was not exactly a t-t-toy, he said, and he was not making it to sell. It was for use in examining objects beneath the surface of the water.

"Plunge the glass below the r-r-ripples and reflections," he explained, "then shut out the light from this other end as you look in, and you 'll be ast-t-tonished to find how distinctly you can see objects at the b-b-bottom, even of a deep pond."

"It 's nothing but a toy, after all," said Syl Bartland. "I did n't know young men cared for toys ! "

She laughed. Lute smiled behind his spectacles, and said, simply, "P-p-perhaps ! " not deeming it expedient to explain further what the "toy" was for.

He had lately hung a little bell under his work-bench, and had connected with it a copper wire running down under the mill floor, and extending the whole length of the mud-sill in such a way that any tampering with the foundations of the dam would instantly give a signal tinkle. The water-glass was designed for the occasional rapid examination of this wire, to see that it remained in place.

A toy, indeed! But whether it was to prove useful or not in providing against the machinations of the Argonauts, it was destined soon to serve a more serious purpose, little suspected now by the laughing Syl, or even by Lute himself.

The brothers, especially Lute and Rush, were a little nervous under the fire of the visitors' bright eyes. But their diffidence became them well; they could hardly have appeared to better advantage in swallow-tail coats, at a ball, than they did there in the mill, with their simple, modest manners, and in their working-day clothes. What a quaint, unpretending, noble fellow was Mart! Where was there another boy of seventeen so frank, fresh-looking, and sensible as Rush? And Lute; how earnest, sympathetic, and interesting, with his delightful stammer! How proud Letty was of them all!

"And these," said Tilly Loring, when once more

afloat with her three companions, returning to Dempford with the ebb, — "these are the mean, obstinate men who take all the water for their factory and don't leave any for the boats! Oh, what a goose I was!"

"But you must admit," Syl Bartland replied, "that sometimes, when it is low water, they *do* shut it off so there is very little left, and that the dam *is* in the way!"

"I don't care if it is!" cried Mollie Kent, merrily, as with gloved hand she pulled her oar. "I hope they 'll keep it; and I think it will be fun to come up some time, just we girls, and make them pull up their flash-boards for us! Will you?"

"O Mollie! Mollie! you are incorrigible!" said Syl. But she, too, looked as if she thought it would be fun.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

"IN STRICTEST CONFIDENCE."

HAVING seen the girls off, Mart went straight to his work-bench and pulled a folded bit of paper out of a crack.

"What's that?" cried Rush. "Where did it come from?"

"It came from a pretty pair of fingers," Mart answered. "I'm going to see what it is."

He unfolded the paper and read these words, pencilled in a pretty, school-girl hand: —

"*In strictest confidence. Look out for your dam on the night of the Fourth.*"

He showed it to Lute and Rush, who read it with puzzled surprise, wondering whether it were meant for a serious warning or a joke.

"Which pair of p-p-pretty fingers left it?" Lute asked. "I think it was that Miss Kent, and she is a little b-b-bundle of mischief!"

"No, it was n't Miss Kent."

"It could n't be that demure Sarah Ball!" exclaimed Rush. Mart shook his head. "Nor Tilly?"

"Nor Tilly! Guess again."

"There's only one more guess, and that's absurd. Miss Bartland defends the Argonauts; and if she left it, why," Rush exclaimed, "then I'm sure it's a joke!"

"She left it," replied Mart; "and if you had seen the look she gave me at the time, you would be as sure as I am that it's no joke at all."

"She's d d-deep!" commented Lute, reading again the words of warning.

"Anyhow," said Mart, "she's no light feather of a girl, to be blown this way and that in her opinions by the people she happens to be with. To tell the truth, I thought all the more of her for standing up a little stiffly for the Argonauts, when Letty and Tilly were abusing 'em."

"Well, I forgive her!" said Rush, with a radiant look at the billet. "We'll act as if it was no joke, anyway! They must n't catch us napping on the night of the Fourth."

"Nor any night, for that m-m-matter. I've fancied all along they were getting ready for something sudden and t-t-tremendous," said Lute. "I've an idea!"

"Something new?" said Mart.

"R-r-rather new. I've been c-c-considering it.

There's that old pump-log we got with Dushee's rubbish. We can make a c-c-cannon of it."

"A cannon!" exclaimed Rush. "How so?" What for?"

"Plug one end; put iron b-b-bands around the but. Then load with sawdust mixed with sand, to sweep the d-d-dam in case of any v-v-very sudden attack."

"O Lute!" said Rush, almost dancing with delight. "We'll get it all ready, and fire it off on the Fourth to try it!"

"Are n't you afraid you'll hurt some of the Argonauts, or frighten their horses?" said Mart, with drawling seriousness; but there was a twinkle in his eye which boded danger to marauders. "You're a reckless fellow, Lute! Let's go and look at your log."

It was, indeed, no false word of warning which the brothers had received. This time, the little commodore had taken the matter in charge; he had consulted a mining engineer, and with his help had formed a plan which could hardly fail to succeed.

There was to be no stealthy attempt at carrying it out. On the contrary, the Argonauts were to come down the river in a fleet of boats on the night of the Fourth, making a great noise of singing and cheering and laughter and splashing of oars; under cover

of which, quick and precise preparation was to be made by scientific hands for blowing up the dam.

"That 's the way to do it!" said Web Foote to the committee on obstructions, flinging back his hair.

"That 's the way to do it!" one of the said committee repeated to his friend Lew Bartland, one evening, at the late commodore's home, — "in strictest confidence," as he declared.

Lew was not pleased with the plot, yet felt himself in honor bound not to divulge it. But a part of the conversation had been accidentally overheard by one who had fewer scruples.

Sylvia had learned of her brother to respect the attitude of the mill-owners. And though she believed the Argonauts had a right to the river, she was equally sure that in their manner of enforcing that right they had put themselves outrageously in the wrong. She had not wished to hear the disclosure of their latest plot; she had tried to shut her ears against it. But she had been compelled to listen to it, and it had filled her with indignation.

"Can't they carry on their little war against those boys, — fifty against five," she said to herself (for the club was now so large), — "without getting help from professional men outside? I'm ashamed of them!"

Then came the opportunity to go up the river with her friends; and sitting with them in the willow-tree, hearing Letty's eloquent story of her brothers' wrongs, the impulse seized her to scribble those words of warning on the blank leaf of a letter, "in strictest confidence," quoting the Argonautic phrase. She trembled afterward to think what she had done. But how could she be sorry?

This was on the first. By the fourth, arrangements on both sides, for attack and defence, were as complete as they could be made, while the Tinkhams remained ignorant of the details of the plot, and the Argonauts knew nothing of the alarm-wire and the wooden cannon loaded with sawdust and sand.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE TUB-RACE.

THE Fourth was a great day on the lake ; a great day especially for Commodore Web Foote If he was n't the pivot on which the world turned, until about twelve o'clock, I should like to know who was ?

It was a bright, breezy morning, — indeed, almost too breezy for the rowing matches. But what were they compared with the grand race in which a dozen sail-boats were to take part? It was a good wind for them, — a good wind particularly for the commodore's new yacht, which (not to keep the reader in suspense) won easily not only the prize-cup, but almost too much glory for one little man.

After the drama, the farce. After the regattas, the tub-race.

That was for small boys ; and the Tinkhams were interested in it, Rod having been induced by some of his young Tammoset friends to join in that rough sport. Three prizes had been offered by the club, indiscriminately to all competitors ; and if even

the least of them could be won by a Tinkham, would n't it (as Lute said) be j-j-jolly? To get anything out of the Argonauts!

The youngsters were ranged along one side of the float, each with his tub, — Rod amongst them, bare-legged and bare-armed, in shirt and tights, with Rupe at his back, to assist in launching him or in pulling him out of water. His companions kept him in countenance; yet he could n't help feeling a little abashed in that rig, before so many people.

A gay-colored throng covered the shore. The balcony, full of pretty girls in holiday dresses, looked like a hanging-basket of flowers. Doorway and windows were crowded; and the float was half the time under water, borne down by its weight of Argonauts. Outside of all was a circle of boats full of spectators.

One of the boats belonged to the Tinkham brothers, and in it were Mrs. Tinkham and Letty, with Lute and Rush. Lute had his water-glass with him, and while waiting for the tub-race to begin, amused himself by looking down into the depths of the lake.

"She is laughing at you!" whispered Rush, who could not keep his eyes from glancing up at the balcony, where a good many eyes were looking down. The pair he alluded to belonged to a certain young

girl in a white straw hat, light blue scarf, and pink dress, with a rose-bud mouth which did indeed blossom in a mirthful smile when she saw Lute leaning over the boat with his "toy."

Lute held it up with a gesture of inquiry, — would she like to try it? She answered with a laughing "I 'll see!" sort of nod, and gave another, still more decided, when Letty motioned her to come down and take a seat beside her in the boat.

"They 're going to start!" said Mrs. Tinkham. "I wish they would make haste, for Rod's sake; he does n't like making a show of himself!"

Rush could have wished the tub-race in Jericho until after they had got Miss Bartland into the boat. He was longing to ask her a question or two regarding the Argonauts' plot.

Commodore Foote, standing on a chair, to get well above the crowd on the float and to keep his feet out of the water, which occasionally washed over it, swung his cap, tossed back his hair, and gave the signal. The half-naked youngsters had been ready and waiting some time, impatient to start; but he had delayed, in order to let Tammoset and Dempford know that nothing could be done without him.

Amidst hand-clapping and cheers, five boys in five tubs started to paddle around a flag-buoy not more

than twenty yards off. It looked to be an easy feat; and so it might have proved for some of them in calm weather. One turned round and round in a ludicrously helpless fashion. Another, too big for his tub, capsized at the start, and was greeted with roars of laughter as he scrambled out of the water. The other three made progress; but a little way from the float the wind struck them and the waves tossed them, and over went a sandy-haired lubber, who managed in his plunge to upset the next tub, which was Rodman's.

"It's Dick Dushee! He did it on purpose!" exclaimed Rush.

Whether Dick did it purposely or not, Rod was in the water, and there was nothing for him to do but to get back to the float with his tub and try again.

Before he made another start, the only tub that had not upset was rounding the buoy; and it looked as if the lucky navigator must win the first prize. But the wind, which had been in his favor when outward bound, was against him on the return voyage. He sat with legs hanging over the side of the tub, and bearing it down; so that, in meeting the waves, it soon took in water enough to founder, and he who had been first in the race must now begin again as the last.

Rod knelt in his tub, balancing it well, and paddling steadily with a pair of wooden scoops. Some used little coal-shovels, attached by strings to the handles of their tubs, so that they might not lose them when they capsized and had to swim. One lost his, nevertheless. That left only four competitors. Of these, the two who next passed the buoy were Rod and Dick Dushee.

The strife between these two became exciting. The trick by which Rod was upset had been noticed, and it won him the sympathy of the spectators.

"Who is that fine-looking boy?" the mother heard some one ask.

"It's a Tinkham! It's one of the Tinkhams!" went from mouth to mouth in reply.

As the two neared the float almost abreast, they were greeted by loud cries from some of the small fry present, — "Scratch water, Dick!" "Put in, Tinkham! pay him for that tip-over!" followed soon by a chorus of shouts from small and great. Dick, in his hurry, had gone down within two yards of the float.

Looking straight before him, heeding nobody, paddling steadily, Rod quickly came within reach of Rupe's outstretched hand, and a burst of applause told that the first prize, a handsome hammock, had

been won. Thereupon the little commodore disappeared in the boat-house, frowning with huge disgust; and a man on the shore, with a vast, sandy desert of a face, uttered a dismal groan.

But others took a more cheerful view of the result.

"I declare!" said Mrs. Tinkham, wiping bright tears from her eyes, "I would n't have believed a bit of foolishness could ever interest me so much!"

"It's the honor of the T-T-Tinkhams that's at stake!" said Lute, radiant behind his spectacles. "I wish Mart was here to enj-j-joy it!" But Mart had stayed at home to guard the premises.

Rush and Letty were in the gayest spirits; nor was their happiness lessened when they looked up at the balcony and saw Syl Bartland clapping hands with delight at Rod's triumph.

They took little interest in the rest of the race, except to see that Dick Dushee did not win a prize.

"Now get her to come down into our boat," said Rush.

"She's coming," replied Letty.

There was a movement on the balcony. Sylvia disappeared. The Tinkhams pushed in between two yachts that lay beside the float.

"Make room here! make room for the ladies!" cried a shrill, authoritative voice within the lower doorway.

The crowd there opened, and Sylvia's rosy face was seen emerging. With her came Mollie Kent, laughing as at some merry adventure. Rush stepped out upon the float, and placed a board so that they could reach the boat without wetting their feet. But behold! three other young girls were following; and now the same peremptory voice called out again, —

"Haul the commodore's yacht a little ahead!"

It was the voice of the commodore himself; and if ever a boy's heart was stepped on and flattened out by mighty disappointment, elephantine chagrin, that heart was Rush Tinkham's when the girls tripped past him, lightly holding their skirts, and titteringly catching at each other as they stepped aboard the yacht.

The owner followed and took the helm. The yacht was shoved off, the sheet was hauled, the flapping canvas filled, the commodore's broad pennant streamed in the wind, and away went Web with his lovely cargo of girls, Sylvia and Mollie smiling and fluttering their handkerchiefs (in mockery, Rush angrily thought) at their friends in the boat.

"I never saw anything so provoking," whispered Letty, as Rush jumped aboard and pushed away.

"You could n't expect a Dempford girl to go over openly and publicly to the enemy, could you?" said Mrs. Tinkham, "under the eyes of all the Argonauts!"

"I was a fool!" muttered Rush, imagining everybody was laughing at him. "Let 's get out of this!"

There was to be a swimming-race after the tub-race. But the Tinkhams took no interest in it; and leaving Rod with Rupe to dress and get the hammock, they took a row up the lake.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

WHAT LUTE SAW IN HIS WATER-GLASS.

RUSH was not in a happy mood. To see the yacht go flying over the water under her broad sail, with her stern conspicuously lettered, "THE COMMODORE," was irritating to a boy of good taste and fine feelings. And the nervous, laughing screams of the girls as she careened to the breeze were not soothing sounds.

"The commodore carries too much c-c-canvas," said Lute.

"It will do for racing," said Rush. "Fellows can take risks when they've only themselves aboard. But look at that!"

"Oh, dear! They will go over!" exclaimed Letty.

"He l-l-luffed just in time," said Lute. "The girls don't trim her as the fellows did he had with him in the race."

"She took in water over the rail, even with them aboard; I saw it," replied Rush.

"I declare," said Mrs. Tinkham, indignantly, "it

"The five girls had been seated on the yacht's windward side."— Page 307.

is criminal to trifle with the lives of young girls in that way!"

"Only a conceited blockhead would do it," said Rush. "The commodore thinks nobody can sail a boat like him, — that an accident can't possibly happen with him at the helm. His looks show that."

"He is n't like me," remarked Lute. "I should be the biggest c-c-coward in the world in his place now."

"He 's coming for us, to show how smart he is," said Rush.

The yacht went rushing past, ripping the water with a loud noise, and sped on her course, leaving the prosaic little row-boat lying like a log in her wake. Not a glance from the girls, who had ceased to giggle, and appeared to be begging the commodore to take them back.

It was very provoking. Rush resolved not to look at the yacht any more. He was rowing steadily along, with Lute behind him in the bow, and his mother and sister in the stern, when suddenly Mrs. Tinkham started forward with a frightened scream, in which Letty joined.

The five girls had been seated on the yacht's windward side, which ran high and higher with every gust. Then all at once the wind, made fitful by the

high, wooded shores, veered about, the sail jibed suddenly and violently, and the boat gave an unexpected roll, the enormous sail going over in the buffet of the flaw.

Rush looked in time to see the gunwale dip, carried down by the weight of girls. They threw up their arms with wild gestures, starting to their feet, and their screams came over the water.

In an instant all was confusion, the iron-ballasted yacht filling and settling rapidly, and the wind still playing with the upper part of the sail, while the lower part was disappearing in the lake. Down, down it went, until at last only the mast-head was seen, like a slanting stake, with the pennant still flying above the surface, where two or three vague objects tossed.

Letty sobbed and laughed hysterically.

"They 'll all be drowned!" said her mother, with white lips.

"Pull! pull!" muttered Lute, snatching an oar from Rush and striking it into one of the forward rowlocks. "Wait a moment! Now!"

"Not another boat in sight!" said Mrs. Tinkham, casting a swift glance around. "Boys, it all depends on you!"

Screams were heard again. That was encourag-

ing. Lute and Rush pulled as no champion oarsmen had pulled on the lake that day. They could not take time to glance over their shoulders; their mother told them how to row.

"Not quite so hard, Lute! You're too much for Rocket. There! there! Now straight ahead!"

"Do you see them?" Lute asked.

"There's somebody clinging to the mast," said Letty, with a convulsive laugh. "And somebody swimming. Row! row, boys! And a head above water. No! it's a floating bonnet."

"Only two?" Rush breathed between strokes.

"That's all I see," said Mrs. Tinkham. "Hold your oar, Lute! That's it, Rocket! Now straight ahead again!" Then, as they drew nearer, "There are two swimming!"

"One must be the commodore," said Letty. "Oh! he is saving somebody! He is helping her get hold of the mast. No, not the mast, but the halyards."

"Bravely, boys! cried the mother. "You'll soon be there! Two girls now at the mast! One has hold of the pennant. Look where you're going, Lute!"

"Oh!" said Letty, in wild despair, "I saw two hands come up and go down again! If we had only been a little sooner!"

"It was while he was saving the other," said Mrs. Tinkham. "Now he is swimming where we saw that one go down. Too late! Careful! careful, boys!"

"Hold, Rocket!" cried Lute. "Take the oar!" He sprang to the bow as the boat, with slackening speed, neared the tragical scene, and called out, "We 'll have you in a m-m-moment!" Even at such a time the poor fellow had to stammer.

"Don't mind us!" said one of the gasping creatures at the mast. "We can hold on. Look for the others!"

It was Mollie Kent, recognizable even with her agonized face and dripping hair.

"There are three more!" said her companion, an older girl whom the Tinkhams had never seen until that day. "Three drowned, — unless you can save them!"

"One went down right here!" cried the little commodore, paddling helplessly about, wild-eyed, his black locks washed over his brows. "Can you dive? For Heaven's sake! I can't!"

He had hitherto supposed he could, and had taken from a platform many a plunge which he thought the world ought to admire. But he could no more go down fifteen or eighteen feet, even to save a life

he had so recklessly imperilled, than he could fly in the air.

Neither were the Tinkham boys at all expert at diving. In their limited swimming experience, their endeavor had generally been to keep as near the surface as possible.

Yet Rush had already kicked off his shoes and thrown down his hat and coat. And now he stood ready to leap, while he kept the boat in place with a single oar.

"There! there!" shrieked Letty.

Something like floating hair appeared on the opposite side of the boat from the poor, paddling commodore. It was slowly settling down again, when Rush saw it, and, using his one oar as a lever, tried to force the boat over broadside toward it. Failing in that, and seeing it about to disappear, he gave a headlong jump, which nearly threw Lute overboard.

Lute saved himself, however. He seized the oar and brought the boat around just as Rush, after a brief struggle in the water, emerged with blinded eyes and dripping face, swimming with one free hand and drawing up something entangled in the other.

"Here! here!" cried Letty, reaching to help him. "I've got hold of her!"

Up came a gasping and strangling face. Lute and Letty pulled the drowning girl into the boat. She was the youngest of the sailing party, — a child not more than thirteen years old.

"It's Isabel! It's your sister, Web!" cried Mollie Kent. "Is she alive?"

"She is alive," said Mrs. Tinkham, who at once took the girl in charge. "Turn her on her face! poor thing! poor thing! She was going down for the last time."

Rush scrambled into the boat, to be ready for any further discovery that might be made. Lute also pulled in the little commodore, who by this time was nearly exhausted with fatigue and fright.

"There are two more missing," said the wretched youth.

"Sylvia Bartland is one of them," said Mollie Kent, in tones of wildest affliction. "I haven't seen her at all! She wouldn't have gone in the yacht if I hadn't urged her."

The wind had lulled a little, and yet the boat was drifting off. Rush took an oar to bring it back.

"What are you doing?" he said to Lute.

Lute had bethought him of his water-glass. He hauled up the big, bungling "toy" from under the thwart, thrust the broad end into the water, and, leaning low over the rail, looked down.

What he saw was quite beyond his stammering astonishment to utter.

On the dark bottom of the lake lay the handsome new yacht, partly on one side. Bright waving gleams danced over it, caused by the sunshine passing through the waves. The deck, the tiller, the sloping mast, the sail sweeping off over the lower beam, were distinctly visible, with one object most wonderful of all.

Down there, in the perfectly clear water, a young girl. She was resting partly on the deck, seemingly inclined to float ; but two little hands in black lace mitts grasped a rope, which prevented her from rising. Dressed in pale pink, with a light blue scarf clasped by a gold pin ; loose auburn hair to which the white straw hat was still tied ; and a sweet, beautiful, almost smiling face, with open eyes staring at vacancy, — all played over by the chasing ripples of sun and shade.

It did not look like death. It was more like a scene of enchantment, a fairy realm in the deep.

"L-l-look!" said Lute, giving the instrument to Rush. "Keep the boat up, w-w-will you?" to the little commodore, who obeyed with the meekness of utter despair and remorse.

Rush looked, and was overboard the next moment, in a headlong plunge.

Lute watched him through the glass, and saw with dismay that he did not descend half-way to the drowning girl, but soon began to swim off in a lateral direction, coming up while he still believed he was going down.

"I can't see in the water!" said Rush, blowing at the surface. "If I could only keep my eyes open! I'll try again!"

"It won't d-d-do!" said Lute. "Put the boat ahead, will you?" to the little commodore. "This is the rope she has hold of!"

It was one of the halyards to which Mollie and her companion were clinging above. Sylvia, with the blind desperation of a drowning person, had caught hold and was clinging fast below. Thus the very effort she was instinctively making to save her life was destroying it.

"Maybe I can shake off her hold," said Lute, "or b-break the rope."

The two at the mast were taken aboard. He then shook and pulled, but in vain. The unconscious girl held fast, and the unstable skiff afforded but a poor support when he tried to free the halyard from its fastening at the deck.

"Wait!" Rush exclaimed. "I can get her."

He could n't dive far; but, laying hold of the halyard, he could go down hand under hand to the yacht.

This he did, sliding his fingers along till they reached those of the drowning girl. He endeavored to unclasp them with one hand, holding one of her wrists with the other. To do so without violence was not so easy a task as he had supposed. His breath, which he was unable to retain, rose in bubbles to the surface. But he was resolved not to loose his hold of that wrist, and never to return to the upper world alone.

He was struggling and groping, believing that something still held her down, when there came a rushing sound in his ears, and behold! he was at the surface with Sylvia Bartland in his arms.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

FROM THE SUNKEN YACHT.

THE place where the yacht went down was hidden from the boat-house by a curve of the shore. But the news had reached there in the midst of the excitement over the swimming-race. The crowd separated in a panic, and now boats were coming to the rescue.

Mrs. Tinkham had never before had any experience in resuscitating the drowned. But she did not need to be taught that less water and more air was in such cases the immediate necessity, and she knew something of the right theory of producing that result.

The commodore's young sister was already so far restored as to be able to care for herself. She went over to the other two rescued girls in the bow, while Mrs. Tinkham and Letty took Sylvia in hand. Letty had quite got over her first hysterical emotion, and she now obeyed and helped her mother in a manner worthy of a Tinkham.

They first turned Sylvia on her face, depressing her head, and opening her mouth to let the water run out. At the same time they compressed her lungs gently, to expel the exhausted air, allowing the chest to expand again and inhale fresh, by its own elastic force. While they continued these movements at intervals, trying to give her life with artificial breath, the boys were searching with the water-glass for the other missing girl.

They discovered her under the shadow of the sail on the other side of the yacht. By this time the first boats had arrived. They had swimmers and even divers aboard. The Tinkhams, therefore, left them, with Commodore Foote, to recover the last of his victims, and with the other four pulled for home.

How they pulled! People in boats or running wildly up the shore shouted at them; but they gave no heed. What Mollie Kent answered they hardly heard or cared.

Suddenly a boat, rowing furiously, turned in their wake, and the boys had a glimpse of a face they knew — a sternly anxious face, white and terrible in its excitement, sending after them looks of entreaty, with wild words, —

"Tell me, I say! is she dead?"

"No! no! I think not! I hope not!" replied

Mollie Kent, excitedly. "It's Lew Bartland and my brother!" she said, sobbing again.

The boat came alongside, and, after a few words exchanged, darted off toward the shore. The Tinkham boys all this time neither spoke word nor missed stroke, but continued to row their heavily freighted boat as if more than their own lives were at stake.

Into the outlet they pulled, then down the river with the tide, to the mill. There, fortunately, they found Mart, who had remained to guard the premises and prepare still further for the Argonauts' expected attack.

How quickly and utterly all thoughts of that were put out of his mind by the arrival of the boat with the shipwrecked girls! Sylvia was by this time recovering consciousness, in great bodily distress. He took her from his mother and sister, and bore her in his arms to the house; Lute and Rush and Letty following up the path over the bank with Mrs. Tinkham, in her wheeled chair, and the other drenched ones on their own feet.

They had hardly entered the house when Charley Kent and Lew Bartland arrived with a doctor they had picked up on the lake shore. Rupe and Rod came running after, carrying their tub, with the

hammock, between them, and behind them flocked a crowd of people. Many of the spectators of the races had gone up toward the sunken yacht; others followed the rescued girls; so that in a few minutes there were on and about the premises more people than had ever been there before, except on the day when it seemed as if half Dempford and Tammoset assembled to see the dam destroyed.

Very different motives brought them now, — not curiosity merely and the love of sensation, but anxious sympathy and eagerness to help.

Women offered their services. These were welcome, Mrs. Tinkham being well-nigh exhausted as well as lame, and the servant being away. Hot drinks were soon prepared, dry clothing was got for the wet ones, and Sylvia was warmed in bed.

"The worst is over," the doctor had said, as soon as he touched her wrist. And now only good nursing was necessary to her complete restoration.

Assured of this, Bartland and Kent and the two older Tinkhams embarked in Lew's boat and rowed with speed up the lake.

They were too late to render any assistance to the lost girl. This was Kate Medway, one of the happiest of the five who were seen to set off so gayly in the commodore's yacht less than an hour before.

She had been taken from the water and borne to the nearest house, followed by a throng of horrified spectators, many of whom knew her and loved her; among them the little commodore, capless, drenched, his wet hair not yet tossed back from his brow, — a stricken, despairing man.

A physician was on the spot. But either she had remained too long in the water, or the right thing had not been done for her the moment she was taken out. Neither skill nor love nor pity nor remorse could help her now. She was an only child; her father and mother were yet to be sent for. Who could bear to tell them the heart-rending news?

The Tinkhams returned home with Bartland and Kent, having a little talk by the way. It was strange that not one of them spoke harshly of the author of the catastrophe. Only Lew said, "I always thought Web knew how to sail a boat." Nothing more.

CHAPTER XL.

THE TIDE TURNS.

WHEN all was over, and the four girls who were saved had been taken home by their grateful friends, and she who perished had also been taken home; when the lake was deserted, and a strange quiet reigned where there had been so much movement and merriment in the morning; then Mart, late that afternoon, said to his brother, as they sat together in the willow-tree, —

"I was intending to put a lamp in the upper mill-window, where it would shine all night across the dam. I was going to be on hand myself, below, with the door open and the wooden cannon in position, and fire that charge of sand and sawdust at the first marauders that came within range. I meant to let Dempford and Tammoset know that we were getting the least mite tired of being trifled with."

"It seemed to be about t-t-time," said Lute.

"But I've changed my mind," Mart continued. "We'll stop in the house to-night. I've a sort of

notion that we 've tried war long enough. I believe there 's something better. You 've had a chance to try that to-day, boys, — you and mother, — and you 've done well. Now, after what has happened, if there are Argonauts who want to meddle with our dam to-night, I say let 'em!"

"And let the w-w-world know it!" said Lute.

"It 's the best way!" Rush declared. "We have had fighting enough. I 'm sick of it!"

Even the younger boys were satisfied with this decision. When it was announced to Mrs. Tinkham, she exclaimed, fervently, —

"I am thankful, boys! I said to myself, in the presence of death to-day, when praying that we might be able to save those precious lives, I said then I would never repine at petty trials after this, but accept the ways of Providence in all things, as I had never done before. What if the dam is destroyed? You can still rebuild it. Or you can do something else. We will live in peace, and be just to all men; and if we cannot prosper, we will at least deserve to."

"I know we shall prosper!" said Letty, overjoyed. "I would n't have had the boys stop fighting from cowardice. But if they stop from a better motive, we shall never be sorry, I am sure!"

Thus the events of the day had softened and deepened all their hearts.

The boys went down at dusk and fired off their wooden gun, well satisfied to see the charge tear the water and throw over a post they had set up against the dam.

"What if that had been an Argonaut?" said Rod, with a chuckle of triumph.

"I 'm rather glad, on the whole, it was n't," said Mart.

"There 's a wire-alarm to sell or to let!" laughed Rush. But the boys did not regret the labor that it had cost.

"If it had n't been for that," said Lute, "I should n't have made the w-w-water-glass. And if it had n't been for that —"

It was terrible to think what might have happened but for that "toy"!

The boys then shut the mill, and soon after went to bed, leaving the dam to its fate.

In the morning it was still there, and there it remained.

The Argonauts were coming to their senses. The light of Buzrow's influence had been extinguished in ridicule, and Web Foote's brand-new popularity, which carried so much sail of self-conceit, had sud-

denly sunk deeper than ever yacht went down. On the other hand, the true characters of the Tinkhams were beginning to be appreciated.

The yacht was raised ; but it quietly disappeared, and was never seen again on Tammoset waters. Web likewise tried to lift his lost reputation, — a more difficult task. He did not have the grace to resign his office ; but at the annual meeting of the club, which took place in August, he was quietly dropped, Lew Bartland being re-elected commodore by a unanimous vote.

Not long after, what new members do you suppose were proposed by him, and admitted with scarcely any opposition? The three older Tinkham boys!

"I don't know that they will consent to join us," Lew said, in advocating their election. "But I hope they will ; and if they do, it will be more an honor to us than to them. At any rate, I want the club to pay them this tribute."

The Tinkhams did consent, the more readily as they were made aware that they had done the Argonauts, in one particular, great injustice.

The mischief done that night when the mill-wheel was broken was not, after all, the work of any members of the club, but of vicious youngsters outside, ambitious of getting into it. He who had shown his

zeal by creeping into the shop, stealing the sledge-hammer, and using it to smash the paddle-blades before throwing it into the river, was — who do you think?

Dick Dushee!

That fact having been discovered by Rupert in his growing intimacy with Tammoset boys, and the damage to the wheel having been paid by Dick's utterly disgusted papa, the older Tinkhams became Argonauts; and those whom a conflict of interests had made enemies found that they ought all along to have been friends.

The dam was as much in the way as ever. But the readiness of the Tinkhams to pull up their flash-boards for passing boats, and a little patience and forbearance on the part of the boatmen, made the difficulty, which had once loomed so great, dwindle to a very small matter, — like so many things in life over which hatred and selfishness may fight, or reason and good-will clasp hands.

Not that all opposition to the dam was ended, by any means. Curiously enough, it was at last abolished by statute, a law having been enacted placing all such waters as the Tammoset, as far as the tides from a harbor rise and fall two feet, under the authority of harbor commissioners, and declaring them

to be navigable streams. But this was after the business of the Tinkham Brothers had outgrown their old quarters, and they had bought a large factory, with steam-power, nearer town.

Meanwhile, a delightful intimacy had grown up between the Tinkhams in Tammoset and the Bartlands and Kents in Dempford, the story of which has not much to do with the Tide-Mill, and so need not be related here.

THE END.

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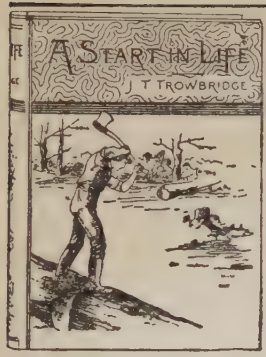

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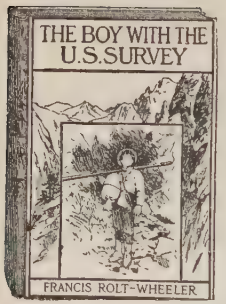

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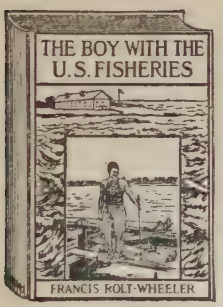

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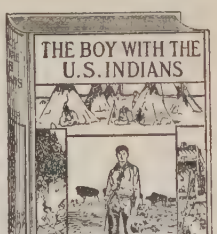

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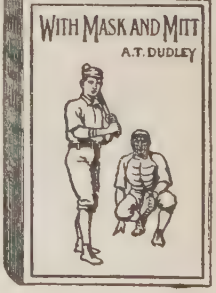

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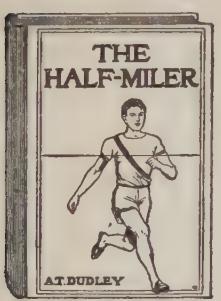

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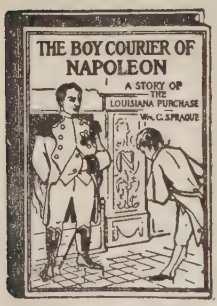

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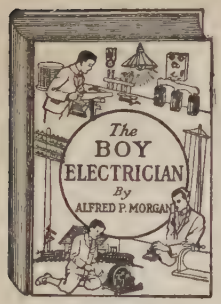

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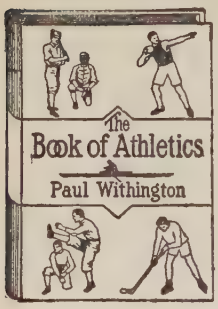

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